



a novel by

MONTENEGRO

This remarkable story is part history and part fiction. It falls into three sections: 'The Battle' at Mojkovac in January, 1916, when the outnumbered Montenegrins capitulated to the Austro-Hungarian forces; 'The Gallows' that await three Montenegrin prisoners of the Austrians during the occupation of Montenegro; 'The End' of Montenegro's existence as an independent state after World War I, when it became part of Yugoslavia.

BY MILOVAN DJILAS

Land Without Justice

MONTENEGRO

MILOVAN DJILAS

*Translated and with an Introduction by
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Preface by William Jovanovich

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To the memory of my Father and Mother

INTRODUCTION

by *Kenneth Johnstone*

Milovan Djilas has become such a controversial political figure that what is possibly the more interesting side of him is in danger of being obscured. The fact is that behind Djilas the party leader, the prominent politician and impatient critic of Yugoslav political and social development, lie Djilas the Montenegrin writer, able to evoke and interpret the whole spirit of a land and a people, and Djilas the former student of philosophy still fascinated by the problems of historical evolution.

The present book belongs, not to his political writings, but to that part of his work which includes his boyhood memories in *Land Without Justice* and his study of Montenegro's national poet, Njegoš; but it differs from both. It is part history and part fiction, fiction being used to illustrate and re-create history. The setting is Montenegro during and immediately after the First World War—a time when the author was between five and nine years of age and of which, therefore, he can have had only such direct impressions, clear but not wide, as a child might have. The theme is the agonizing transformation of the country, under internal and external pressures, from an antiquated patriarchal monarchy into a province of the new Yugoslav state.

The history of Montenegro is that of a handful of tribes, mainly Slavonic but with some admixture of Albanian blood, who thanks to the impassable nature of their country and to their own resolution and hardihood succeeded in preserving themselves from conquest by the Turk and welded themselves into a principality of an altogether ex-

ceptional kind. From early in the sixteenth century, when the last representative of the last of Montenegro's medieval dynasties quitted the country for an easier life at Venice, until the middle of the nineteenth century this little state was governed by its chief ecclesiastic, the *Vladika*, or Orthodox bishop, and from the end of the seventeenth century until the middle of the nineteenth this office was held by the same family, the family of Petrović Njegoš, the title descending from uncle to nephew since Orthodox bishops are forbidden to marry. It was not until 1852 that the union of the two offices was dissolved and Montenegro became once again a secular principality (a kingdom in 1910), still ruled by the same family. In this form it lasted until 1918, when Montenegro was merged in the new Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later renamed Yugoslavia.

But it was not only the political constitution of Montenegro which was peculiar. The whole social structure of the country was a survival from the distant past, unparalleled elsewhere in Europe except in neighboring Albania and perhaps in the Highlands of Scotland before 1745. At the base of it lay the division into tribes or clans, each clan being composed of family groups known as "brotherhoods" and each "brotherhood" of "households." The chiefs of these subdivisions of the clan were known as "headmen," whose office was nominally elective but normally successive in the same family, so that collectively the "headmen" came to form a hereditary governing class. "Household" was bound to "brotherhood" and "brotherhood" to clan by the ties of blood relationship and by the belief, none the weaker for being theoretical, in descent from a common ancestor. Loyalty to kindred was primary, as will be seen from many passages in this book, and the clan system was so essential a part of the state that communities or individuals migrating into free Montenegro

from the Turkish-occupied Balkan lands had to be adopted into one or other of the existing units.

So long as the Turkish menace lasted, this traditional framework served Montenegro well. The peace, in the main, was kept between the tribes, the prestige of the governing house was maintained by a succession of competent rulers. But as the Turkish domination of the rest of the Balkans weakened, although war with the Turks continued at intervals throughout the nineteenth century, and as the region became the scene of a struggle for influence between Austria and Russia, Montenegro was drawn into the main current of European politics. It was chiefly a client and ally of St. Petersburg, though always it had an eye on Vienna. Montenegro's hereditary profession of fighting the Turk may be said to have come to an end in 1912, when the united efforts of Serbia, Greece, Montenegro, and Bulgaria drove the Ottoman Empire out of Europe almost entirely. It is significant to Djilas's story that by 1918 Montenegro had fought not one but three successive wars—the First Balkan War in 1912, the Second Balkan War (against Bulgaria) in 1913, and the First World War, half of which she spent under Austrian occupation. But even without the appalling mortality and strain of these three major conflicts Montenegro was subjected to stresses which were bound in the end to break down her antique structure. By blood, by language, by history, and by the traditional sympathy springing from all three, Montenegro was a part of the Serb race, which included not only the inhabitants of Montenegro and Serbia * but a large part of the population of Bosnia and

* A distinction has been made in the translation between "Serb" and "Serbian," the former referring to the Serb race considered as a whole, the latter only to the Serbs inhabiting the Kingdom of Serbia. It needs to be emphasized that the Serbians and Montenegrins were, and are, of the same nationality and religion and use the same language. In historical origin, they are one people.

Hercegovina as well, besides the Slavs settled in Austro-Hungarian territory across the Danube to the north of Belgrade. The state of Serbia, which had been a thriving kingdom, and even briefly an empire, during the Middle Ages, had regained its liberty from the Turk at the beginning of the nineteenth century and gradually became the focus of hope for all the South Slavs still under Turkish or Austrian rule, for whom Serbia aspired to fill the role which Piedmont had played in the unification of Italy. The nationalism engendered by the France of the First and Second Empires and by the revolutions of 1848 had affected the Balkans too and had raised hopes of union, a union, first, of all Serbs (the "Serb Idea," so often mentioned in this book) and, more widely, a union of all the Southern Slavs (the "Yugoslav Idea"), comprising in addition to the Serbs, the Croats, Slovenes, and Slav Macedonians. The arch-enemy of both Ideas was bound to be Austria-Hungary, without whose dismemberment neither could be realized. In all the Yugoslav lands, including Montenegro, and especially among the younger generation, many of whom went to Belgrade for their university education, these aspirations took hold and they were energetically pursued by idealists and by political, military, and commercial realists alike.

It was obvious from an early stage that Montenegro, in its traditional form, as a tribal society under a patriarchal autocracy, could not fit into a modern state of the kind which the Serb and Yugoslav patriots had in mind, however loosely federated, and in fact as far back as the 1860's the young ruler of Montenegro had offered to abdicate in favor of the Serbian Prince if the latter proved able to unite the Serbs in a single state. Perhaps only the exhaustion following prolonged war and the absence of the royal family from the country during the years of occupation could finally have broken the spell of the past. Even so the

agony of the parting was great and resistance to the change was bitter. The story of this book, more than the story of any one of its characters, alive as these are, is the story of this change at its most crucial moments.

The book has three parts, separated in time but connected in theme. The first centers round the last battle fought by the Montenegrins against the invading Austrians in the winter of 1916, when the Montenegrins held the enemy in check until corruption, vacillation, and self-seeking at the seat of government opened the gates.

The events of the second part take place under the subsequent Austrian occupation. It describes the imprisonment, preceding execution, of three typical Montenegrin patriots belonging to three different generations—an Army Captain, a young student of philosophy, and an old peasant. It depicts the attempts of the Austrian authorities to induce them to compromise and their final resolution to resist to the death. The psychological and physical experience of men condemned to die is treated here with dreadful accuracy and deep understanding.

The last part concerns the struggle between the old and new forces at work in the reshaping of the country, when victory has been achieved and the dream of unification has at last been realized. But here a theme which recurs throughout the book becomes dominant. An ideal is bound to sacrifice its purity in becoming reality. We see two old-style Montenegrin leaders in the new border provinces vainly trying to adapt themselves to the new conditions and being led to destruction by their passions and by the political and social currents of the new age. Nothing new, it seems, can come to birth without some sacrifice of old virtues, and no new order, however ardently and selflessly pursued, will be without its imperfections.

Throughout the book runs a commentary on the Montenegrin national character. Political and geographical

isolation, a small, closely knit society steeped in its own traditions and its own culture, centuries of hardship and war, all these were bound to leave deep marks on a people. The West saw only the romantic side of Montenegro—the heroism, the poetry, the magnificent panache: it did not know, or it overlooked, the darker side—the peasant craftiness and obstinacy, the violence, arrogance and occasional absurdity, the greed for power and pleasure of the warrior who has lived hard and suddenly finds himself out of military employment and faced with wider, wealthier opportunities.

In imagination—and when imagination is aroused, in language—in the penetration of historical processes, in delicate feeling for men and nature and for the color of events, in these, at his best, Djilas is a master. He has the prophet's anguish, seeing the good that is lost with the old order, so that when judgment has been passed on all the evil in it there is still some grief at its going, and full of righteous, untimely anger at the imperfections of the new. From his vision, and from the exercise of his gifts, has come a book which deepens our understanding of his people and communicates his love for them.

A NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION: *The translator had been authorized by the publisher, who followed Mr. Djilas's wishes in this respect, to edit the work during the process of translation. Mr. Djilas himself was not able to reduce and alter certain portions of his writing as he had planned, hence the obligation has fallen upon the publisher and translator; and it is their hope that they have exercised care in presenting the book as the author would desire it to appear finally.*

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THE BATTLE

This book has, as it were, no beginning.

It could have any number of beginnings, unbelievably far back in time, here on the spot at Mojkovac.

How, then, is one to begin? Perhaps by relating, as in some ancient chronicle, how an old and mighty empire—Austria-Hungary—invaded the little state of Serbia, which had just emerged from centuries of slavery and spoilation.

The armies of Austria-Hungary, Germany, and Bulgaria trampled Serbia. But the path of the empire was still barred by the spare and poverty-stricken land of Montenegro, and at Mojkovac the Montenegrins fought their last battle, fought to decide whether they could preserve at least some memory of themselves and of their name.

All that was left of Serbia was a handful of martyred men in flight to the sea. Now two Montenegrin armies stood on their own frontiers, and a third had just reached the frontier—the army that for months had retreated alongside the Serbs from the depths of Bosnia, from range to range and from bloodshed to bloodshed. Now they were on the Tara, at the frontier—not the official state frontier, for that they had already left behind them—but the frontier of their old homeland, of the Montenegrin clans, of the history of Montenegro that is not written down but is remembered in the blood. This army had nowhere to withdraw to. Every backward step meant a clan trodden underfoot—and there were not many of them—a century's heroic suffering and effort betrayed, the abandonment of a true myth and of an epic that still filled their hearts with pride.

A man can abandon everything—home, country, land—

but he cannot abandon himself, that by which he lives and by virtue of which he is what he is. The Serbs carried this concept with them into foreign lands, at least to preserve it, like sacred bones, for future generations. The Montenegrins could not do that; outside their homeland and their clan kinships they are not what they were, what they were bound to be.

Just below Mojkovac, at the point where the steep road drops down beneath the watchtower to the ford of the Tara, there was then, and for long after, a wooden bridge, longer than the mere width of the river because when there are floods the Tara here spills over the scrub on the left bank. The bridge was hastily erected by the Montenegrin state after the war with Turkey in 1912. Up to that time there had been no bridge; a little upstream had been the boundary between two states and between two hostile faiths, so nobody had gone to any trouble to connect them.

Bluish in color, and often thick and turbid, the temperamental Tara broke the bridge frequently, but it was regularly patched up again. Just now the army had thoroughly reinforced it and had extended it across the scrub, throwing in piles of stones and binding them together with stakes. This bridge, built by men and continually unbuilt by the elements, a fearful thing to cross, though it managed to support horses and men, was a slender, unreliable link between Montenegro and its acquisitions of 1912. But to the Montenegrins, Montenegro still extended only as far as this wooden bridge; on the other side was until yesterday, so to speak, Turkey, the Sandžak, a country only just taken into possession and as yet wholly unassimilated. Now the war had reached this point, had reached the ridge above Mojkovac, above the bridge, on the very day of the Orthodox Christmas Eve. It had reached the lands of the Montenegrin faith and name, of Montenegro's speech and blood, of its poetry and its pastures, its waters and its skies.

The bridge was smothered under the press of Montenegrins toward the frontier. Old men and young boys, crippled veterans and volunteers were hurrying toward the old frontier at the summons of the enemy's gunfire. There was a little crowd of women hurrying too, from different parts of the country, united by the journey and by a common concern for their kinsfolk and for their country. On the bridge they came face to face with a group of soldiers from a beaten and scattered company who were withdrawing in disorder over the Tara and allowing foreigners to establish themselves on the Montenegrin frontier. To soldiers accustomed by then to retiring from one ridge to another, the ridges of Mojkovac were just like any others. It was easy to recognize a scattered and bewildered army: everything about them hung dead—their arms and their clothing; they had lost heart. The women neither heard nor listened to these bedraggled soldiers, who were dejectedly justifying themselves; they had lost their unit, they were not from this part of the country, and they did not know that this was the frontier. Rawboned and dressed all in black, the women barred the bridge to the soldiers with furious oaths and curses and tore the weapons from their hands and shoulders. They would go into action themselves, they would stem the invasion.

Montenegro was defending itself against the conqueror. But Montenegro was at odds with itself, rent and torn. Before it ever burst into the round of blood and fire on the heights of Mojkovac, war had reopened all its wounds, the frantic feuds and insensate hatreds among the Montenegrins themselves.

It was January of 1916.

Serbia had been overrun by the forces of the Central Powers. The remnants of its armies, its court, and its government had retreated southward and were now around Scutari and Elbasan.

On the morning of January 6, Austria-Hungary began an attack on Montenegro from three sides.

At the Montenegrin royal palace in Cetinje, all the lights were out and all the gates were locked. All that stirred was a mortal fear for the royal house. The stupefied court seethed with intrigues, propositions, doubts, and surmises. The sycophants and the wastrels crept and darted around, sniffing—they smelled a new master, who was ringing the country with fire and calling from beyond it with the voice of the guns.

What did they want, the court and its hangers-on? What were they hoping for? They wanted to put a fence between themselves and Serbia, the whole Serb race. They dreamed, they hoped, that they would be able to make a separate peace with the Austro-Hungarian Empire, if only to save something of their power, of the dynasty. So they were against union with Serbia, the only real and possible union of the Serbian race under Serbia's leadership. They cared only about what would become of their own way of life—yet it was just this that they were bound to lose.

Behind them were the army, and the nation, too—at least that part that was still fired by the idea of its independence, hard won over the centuries, that part that still thought in terms of brotherhood and the clan and had grown used to the absolute, patriarchal form of government. Their chieftains were bound by memories of old battles and rebellions to the cause of the court and the royal house, and by rewards and preferments from their

master's hands. They were ready to die, as they had died in the past, for the independence of Montenegro—such as it was. They believed in the old King, whose ancestors, and indeed he himself, had created a state upon the bare rock and had composed a noble epic of human defiance in the face of evil and brute force. This was the Montenegro whose prowess and fame could not fail—a Montenegro brimming over with the legendary spirit of Kosovo, a Montenegro comprised of soldiers bloodstained, exhausted, famished after battles that had already lasted a year and a half, soldiers wearing peasant sandals and leggings, without commissariat or supply services, and with little or no modern equipment.

They were fighting for the legend by which they lived. They knew they could not win the war; but they knew, too, that they were bound to defend, perhaps even save, the legend of heroism and individuality by their lives and by their death.

There are times when an idea, a faith, in the face of all possibilities, achieves the impossible.

But there were other feelings as well. A current of moral revolt ran through the people that had its beginning in the war against the Turks in 1878. Marko Miljanov and other commanders and leaders following that war of liberation warned against the Prince's autocratic rule and lust for power and against subservient and loose-living coteries at the court. Thereafter, at the beginning of the twentieth century, their opposition shaped itself, through constitutional struggles, into a political movement having two wings, one reformist, the other revolutionary.

The dynasty crushed and scattered this movement, but it remained a power for the future, strong in the wisdom that time confirms. It had a presentiment of its adversary's weakness; it even made disclosures about the court and spread tales about it.

Why had Crown Prince Danilo taken refuge abroad as soon as the war began and the country was drenched in blood? And it was said that this future ruler of blood-stained Montenegro could not endure to see so much as a slaughtered chicken. Was not his wife an Austrian who had given him no male children? Weren't there reports—even the foreign newspapers wrote about them—of his plotting with Vienna? All through the war it was so quiet at the Lovćen front that it seemed as if the armies were not there to fight. The command on that front was held by Prince Petar, the King's youngest son, the one of whom it had been whispered, and was now openly proclaimed, that he had killed Brigadier Bošković and brought confusion on the Montenegrin Army before Scutari in the war against the Turks in 1912. And what was this Petar up to now? Gambling at Budva—in a sector of the front undisturbed by the enemy—and having a high time with the wife of a priest who was a notorious Austrian agent. In the language and picturesque terms of a cold-blooded horror such as only Montenegro affords, a Montenegrin officer described Prince Petar's style of command: one hand on the telephone ordering the Montenegrins to lay down their lives and the other caressing the curves of a whore. And the ruler's third son, Mirko, was in confinement; he had quarreled with his brother Danilo about the declaration of war, because he himself was in favor of the war and in favor of supporting Russia. He was rotting away with a shameful disease. Neither he nor his brother Petar had ever been able to leave a good-looking woman in peace. The family was degenerated. And they were the shield of Montenegro, the heirs to the victories of the past! Even King Nikola had grown quite senile. Time and too long a spell of absolute government had transformed a once wise, patriotic, and benevolent ruler into a crotchety, short-sighted, capricious tyrant whom hardly anyone listened to any more. He had

grown deaf. He had become a laughing-stock: he got hold of a machine gun and posted it so that he could take pot shots in person at Austrian airplanes. But he clung and clung to his authority; he trusted not a living soul, not even his own sons.

And what an unbrotherly reception was given to the Serbians! They littered the roads and doorways of Montenegro with their corpses. Where was the food promised them on their line of retreat? Where was the feeling of brotherhood and kinship?

Would the Montenegrins withdraw in the wake of the Serbians, to fight until they collapsed or were victorious, or would they throw themselves on the mercy of the Germans and Hungarians?

All the currents of Montenegrin feeling were set against Austria-Hungary, feeling fed by hate, by fear, by Austria's own implacable enmity. But neither Serbia's grim fate nor Montenegro's equally grim prospects had appeased or reconciled the factions. On the contrary, both countries were now looking for the authors of their misfortune.

During the days of the attack on Montenegro, at the instant when the Austrians drove through to the Mojkovac ridges, the relations between the rival parties within the country reached white heat. It was a clash between the legendary past and the appalling sanguinary present. At a time when worlds are crumbling and men are pulling down empires, ideas are extreme. But Montenegro was a country which in any event knew neither moderation nor patience.

The Montenegrin partisans of union with Serbia took its misfortune as their own. Serbia's fate had been peculiarly Serbian—to go down in ruin but with head unbowed. Resist, then, to the last bullet and the last man, these Montenegrins declared, but resist in the Serb cause and not simply to enable the court at Cetinje to strike a bargain

with the court at Vienna. The partisans of the dynasty, on the other hand, the opponents of union, accused the unionists of forgetting their primal allegiance. Where, they cried, is your loyalty to the glory and independence of Montenegro?

Dissension and passion went deepest among the older leaders. They stood higher and saw further: the soldiery of the clans had committed their lives to them, and the country and the state their destiny. And, as always when the destinies of nations, movements, and ideas are being decided, strife gave rise to personal differences, complicated struggles for the upper hand, the paying off of old scores.

Quarrels broke out even in the presence of Serbian officers. There were Serbian officers at Mojkovac, gunners left behind from units that had retreated through Albania to the sea; these had then been detailed with their guns to reinforce the Montenegrin defense. They stood apart; they could not understand this Montenegrin squabbling about who was a better Serb and what was to be done tomorrow with the two small Serb states, one of which had already been overrun while the other was about to be overrun.

But for the Montenegrins, for their leaders and intellectuals, inspired by legends and by absolute ideas, born to wrangle and speculate even when engaged in highly practical affairs, this dispute was a reality that would decide their fate and that of their homeland. There were unresolved political conflicts; there were acts of violence, attempted murders, conspiracies, imprisonments, escapes from the country, and wanderings in foreign lands. And above all there was the myth of the past—the Serb cause as a struggle between good and evil, and the Montenegrin royal house as the bearer and the expression of Montenegrin independence—and the legend of the future—the

union of all Serbs and of all Yugoslavs in the cause of progress and freedom.

2

Montenegro had no supreme military commander at that time. One person, Serdar Janko Vukotić, could have been the man if he had not been too closely tied to the court circle. One other person, Marko Daković, was still too little known and enjoyed too little power and scope to fill such a position at that time.

Montenegro did not produce such a man, but the battle of Mojkovac did. And the battle of Mojkovac showed the essence of Montenegro, which had never surrendered to anything, not even to its own evil. At this time Serdar Janko Vukotić turned out to be the man. He stood, and will forever remain, in the foreground of the battle of Mojkovac. He was not aware of his accomplishments, nor did he intend them perhaps. But the Serdar acquitted himself honorably, and the peculiar quality of the battle of Mojkovac made itself felt from the beginning.

Janko Vukotić was the only Montenegrin who after the introduction of a regular army had the right to use, besides his rank of general of division, the title of Serdar—the word came to Montenegro with the Turkish invasions and signified the military command, first, over a number of clans, and later over a whole province. But he himself used this title less often than others addressed him by it. Among the people it was inseparable from his name: Serdar Janko, the only one and the last. He was the last great man of classic Montenegro. In him it shone out for the last time.

Serdar Janko was the only great commander of the Montenegrin Army in two wars, the earlier war in 1912 with

Turkey and the present war with Austria. In the war of 1912 he had liberated Sandžak and Metohija with few casualties and as though it were child's play; and if his advice had been followed, Scutari would have been taken in the same way. Its capture later cost six thousand dead to an army that numbered in all about thirty thousand.

As with all true commanders, the decisions behind Serdar Janko's battles were extremely simple. They still look simple today. But they were the fruit of complex and not wholly conscious reasoning. For decisions of this kind one must have a special gift, which cannot be acquired, although it demands both experience and knowledge. Like many gifts, this one is given to few, and it consists of a half-instinctive ability to note one's adversary's weakness, to feel for his vulnerable spot, and, at the right moment, to put forth one's own strength. It is a feeling and a flair for what is possible in battle.

The Serdar knew that resistance was possible: and he gave orders for it, briefly and clearly.

Slow in his movements and reactions, but not so slow as to be always late, on the heavy side and fond of comfort, but not so overweight or so pampered as to shirk life at the front with the army, Serdar Janko never lost touch with the battle or with those who fought it. Yet he did so for the first time at Mojkovac, his biggest and most notable battle. He was forced to hurry off to Podgorica, to Cetinje, at a summons from the King and the government, owing to the crisis caused by the Austrian invasion. Even so, he launched the battle and was the inspiration behind it.

Among the rank and file—and especially among the common soldiers and the lesser leaders, on whom a battle most depends—there springs up very quickly, in some quite inexplicable way, a feeling of trust or distrust in their commanders. It was this kind of confidence that the Montenegrin soldiers had in Serdar Janko. They believed with

devotion in his lucky star—"The Serdar has a lucky star," they would say, knowing from experience that they would not be plunged into some senseless blood bath, nor would their lives be risked for any reason except the destruction of the enemy. In the battle of Mojkovac, both the soldiers and their superiors felt this lucky star, even though the Serdar himself was absent. His spirit launched and led the battle. It was his battle.

Serdar Janko was not a very well-educated man; he had been through the School for Noncommissioned Officers and taken army courses somewhere in Italy. But he had seen something of the world and had a swift, simple, almost instinctive sense of direction in managing people. Besides, he had more knowledge of the science of war than his subordinates, enough at any rate to be able to lead his fellow countrymen, who could hardly be considered a regular army and had never been faced with an adversary much more expert than themselves until the modern army of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy moved against them.

There was not a man in Montenegro whom his opponents attacked with greater justification and who at the same time deserved it less. By descent and kinship and in his ideas he belonged to the innermost court circle, with whose intrigues his soldierly gifts and professional outlook found it difficult to fit in. Although he was one of the creators of the court camarilla and a defender of its interests, he remained true to the warrior in himself; he never subordinated the battle or the army to intrigue or passion, but solely to one political end—the nation and the homeland. At the time of Montenegro's tragic and ignominious surrender, he remained loyal and obedient to the ruler and his government. But in this, too, he managed to find a way not to tarnish his own name and with it his wider loyalty to the Serb cause and to his homeland. He carried out the order for the disbandment of the Montenegrin Army.

even though he was plainly against it; but he would have no part in any political collusion with the occupying power. Instead, he retired to his home at Čevo and later went peacefully into internment with thousands of other Montenegrins.

The opponents of union held it against him that he accepted office after 1918; he was appointed army commander at Sarajevo. He had sold himself, they said, and betrayed his King and the state in which he had played a prominent part. The supporters of union, on the other hand, could not forgive him the past; he had persecuted them, tormented them, and at times, most often when times were hardest, he was the pillar of the Montenegrin state and of the royal authority, since these unfortunately were one and the same, as in all despotisms. But he had in fact been true to himself throughout; his state, his army, and his people were on both these sides at once.

Of distinguished family, related to Queen Milena, he was afflicted, at least outwardly, with the arrogance of his native Katun, an arrogance assumed even by those belonging to the more obscure communities of the district. It rested, not altogether unreasonably, on the belief that their locality had been the creative force behind everything—state, dynasty, the Montenegrin Idea. It found expression in a special way of walking, a special stance and bearing—measured, stiff, and condescending—and in a special way of talking—terse, with a careful choosing of words and a use of them as economical as if they were gold coins.

But this was only the Serdar's outward semblance—an inheritance from his particular milieu, like his other eccentricities. He was a man of Katun, and he was commanding men from the north of the country—but none of them so much as noticed these peculiarities or were put off by them.

His big head, with the clear, serene brow and the ever-serious dark eyes, which at times rounded in a stare, in-

spired confidence, and his contained, indefinite smile suggested solid strength. He loved a good joke and good food, but he was neither a buffoon nor a glutton. He stood out above all orders, titles, fame and power, politics and the habits of the court, as the complete Montenegrin soldier, always to be relied on, and, when the issue at stake was life or death, as a man able to link legend with reality, to lead and win a battle, to create new realities.

The soldiers under him felt this. Not even the Serdar could hide his true self from them.

3

There was one other essential person connected with the battle of Mojkovac, historical even if forgotten. Seemingly neither distinguished nor important, he was in direct command of the battle on the Montenegrin side. This was Miloš Dragišin Medenica, the commander of the Kolašin brigade.

In no respect was he strikingly different from the rest of the Montenegrin officers. At the age of nineteen he graduated from the School for Noncommissioned Officers at Cetinje. This school imparted no great store of knowledge, but it produced the first regular officers to replace the earlier, untrained leaders who had attained their posts by hereditary succession or by distinguishing themselves in battle. These new officers, too, were as a rule the sons of the old untrained chieftains or else came from influential clans. The hereditary principle was maintained in this respect, too. They lived as the backbone of the court's authority, and along with a few enlightened educators and the new, qualified priests they formed the country's only intelligentsia. It was they who led Montenegro and its army through three wars.

Like other officers, Miloš lived in the country. The substantial estate was given to his famous father, Dragiša Perkov, who was still alive, for his services to the country, especially those rendered in the fighting of 1876. Miloš sprang from the powerful Morača group of the Dožić and Medenica families, which had given most of the abbots to the medieval monastery of Lower Morača, and who in Turkish times filled as much a military as a clerical post. He had not paid much heed to his father's name or his family's high reputation, and his schooling had done little for him. If it had not been for the battle of Mojkovac, he would have lived his life unnoticed, and he would have died unnoticed. But the battle of Mojkovac awoke in him the strength and qualities that keep a man from oblivion.

He gave the impression of being an inept, slow man; he was thickset, bony, brown, with little eyes obliterated under jutting eyebrows. He spoke little and seemingly with effort. In his brigade many of the officers, right up to the battle of Mojkovac, were dissatisfied with his slow, rather awkward way of running things, since most of them held that he had attained his high rank more as his father's son and as a member of his clan than by his own merit. It was held that even his courage was slow, stiff, unadaptable to new situations—and all situations were new. But no one did or could deny him his calm, almost icy courage and persistence in everything he did, particularly in the discharge of his duties. He was the same in his family—even-tempered, deliberate, and hard-working; no labor on the land could make him flinch, as if he made no distinction between sending a battalion into action and harvesting hay or plowing.

Montenegro had no proper standing army. Recruits were called up for short periods of training in the summer months only. But Miloš had for years been unobtrusively

training those under his command. His obdurate composure had won him the confidence of the army as well as that of his clan even before the three wars. He was peculiar in this. It was generally known that if Miloš Medenica said this or did that, it must be right.

Few people had ever seen him angry; yet it was known that he could fly into a rage in which he would not completely lose his judgment but which he could not bring under control until he got his way. These were the rages of a man finally exasperated by evil and injustice, in whom, as it were, a second self, hitherto invisible and unknown, had broken loose, while he himself remained self-possessed.

He was particularly well known for his austere and retiring family life. No one could say that Miloš had ever been attracted by any woman but his own wife. It was not that he was critical of the modern manners, the loosening of the old moral standards following the wars of 1875-78, after which Montenegro was no longer threatened from without. He was made in a simple, austere mold. Even if he ever noticed another woman, he never sought to enjoy any except his wife. He found no pleasures anywhere but in his own or his friends' houses. Feasts, drinking parties, all-night sessions, dice—all these were foreign and even unpleasant to him.

Soldiering was not much of a burden to him, but he obviously found little pleasure in it and was not hungry for the fame it could bring him. It was a duty, higher than any other, perhaps the highest of all, but no more than that. Nor had politics any attraction for him; he was a good Serb and a loyal subject and servant of his master.

His fullest, possibly his only, enjoyment lay in his estate and his family in the care of his sons and his orchards. He could never have enough of the fields and meadows beside the clear stream in the valley that thrust deep into the

Sinjajevina Mountains, whose winds dispelled heat, and whose bare grassy contours delighted his eyes more than anything.

It was only owing to exceptional circumstances that the whole weight of the battle of Mojkovac fell on his shoulders and that he became the key personality in it.

Up to the time of the battle, Miloš had commanded only the Kolašin brigade. Two other brigades, the Plevlja and Bijelo Polje, composed of men from the territories liberated from Turkish control in 1912, had more or less broken up when the enemy occupied their part of the country. Such Moslems as there had been among them had one and all deserted, and following them were a good many Serbs. Three battalions of recruits, made up of young men from all over Montenegro, had been decimated in earlier engagements, chiefly while carrying out tasks that to the rest of the army seemed impossible and inconceivable. All these units, except the U'skok battalion, which came up as a reinforcement during the course of the battle, found themselves in the neighborhood of Mojkovac after the fighting in Bosnia and Sandžak, and at a time when the Mojkovac passes had become, in winter conditions, the only possible passage for Austrian troops breaking through from the north.

Both the German and the Austrian commanders, August von Mackensen and Hermann Kövess, had attached great importance to a breakthrough into the Lim Valley, the boundary between the Orthodox population to the north and the Moslem and Albanian population to the south. Its purely military importance, however, diminished as soon as it was no longer possible by occupying the valley to cut off the Serbian armies, which by now had retreated past the Lim Valley to the Adriatic. Moreover, beyond the Lim stood the spurs of the Komovi, practically impassable in wintertime. This then became a secondary pass. The Moj-

kovac defile, a little over six miles long, and, owing to the snow, passable for a distance of no more than two miles, was the sole northern gateway into Montenegro.

The Austrians knew this—and the Montenegrins, too, down to the last soldier. The Austrians had to get through this gateway. They had to finish this war with a small state, which was dragging on too long and was proving too entangling. The Montenegrins could not afford to let them through, not so much because they had no other point at which they could meet the enemy—lower down, for at least ten and a half miles, all the way to Vjeternik, there were positions of exactly the same kind, if not even more favorable—but because if they were to give up the positions they were now in, it would be plain that they had neither the will nor the strength to offer resistance on the threshold of their country.

On the Orthodox Christmas Eve, January 6, 1916, a concentric attack by the Austrian Third Army began. In the west, along the Adriatic coast, one prong reached toward Lovćen, the promontory guarding the capital, Cetinje. A second prong, farther inland and midway between the sea and the Mojkovac sector, pushed southward from Hercegovina toward the old Montenegrin stronghold of Nikšić. The third prong was aimed at Kolašin and it moved along the Mojkovac defile. The Austrians had occupied the defile on the day before Christmas Eve without encountering much resistance.

They were not surprised at their success; they had already carried similar hill positions after preliminary bombardment. What they found remarkable was that the Montenegrins did not as usual retire to the next hilltop, on the farther side of the Tara, but, making a general move toward Bjelašica, remained on the same slope, right there in the brush and forest, some three hundred to six hundred yards away. Clearly these were their forward units,

which were displaying an exceptional stubbornness and fighting spirit.

Serdar Janko was well aware of the importance of Mojkovac at the moment when a hundred thousand victorious soldiers with a thousand cannons were making a final onslaught on a Montenegrin army that was three times inferior in numbers and ten times less well equipped. He might have known, and did know, that this offensive would provoke at the court a desire for a separate peace and for surrender. There had been rumors of this in court circles even before. Austro-Hungarian influence had for some time been strong among the Montenegrin ruling classes, and it was all the stronger for their fear of union with Serbia. If union were to come, Serbia would deprive them of their separate status and thereby of their authority. The fall of Serbia, the Allies' defeats, and the clear superiority of Austria-Hungary could even afford the partisans of a separate peace pretexts for maintaining that it was their sacred duty to save the last patch of Serb land and statehood by any means they could. Resistance at Mojkovac would dispel this spirit of surrender. Obviously without any prospect of a prolonged resistance, Montenegro could still withdraw its army gradually in the wake of the Serbs if an atmosphere of unconditional resistance prevailed. And apart from the military and moral reasons, considerations of this kind drove the Serdar to resist at Mojkovac simply as an opponent of surrender—since surrender was what in practice a separate peace was bound to mean. He had, besides, an army that had been in action throughout the war and in which, exhausted as it was, the fighting spirit had not declined. Suddenly that spirit had boiled up with the army's withdrawal to the old Montenegrin frontier.

But the Serdar, when his presence was required by the King and the government, had no one else to entrust with

the command at Mojkovac but the commander of the strongest unit, Miloš Medenica, whom he knew well both as a man and as a leader. The Serdar wished to fight vigorously and honorably at this decisive moment and acted accordingly, and the new commander, Medenica, took over the task entrusted to him as if it were entirely in accord with his own nature.

During the battle, Medenica was present everywhere, as if on wings, radiating a buoyant enthusiasm and a gentle concern, almost tenderness, for his soldiers and subordinates. The Serdar had not been mistaken in his choice of a deputy. This battle was an opportunity for every man, and every man seized the chance to show himself better than he was.

4

The Serdar's headquarters were at Kolašin—some twelve and a half miles from Mojkovac—but he knew the Mojkovac positions well; it was from there and under his command that the war against Turkey had begun in 1912.

Naturally, he was disagreeably surprised by the Austrian drive to the Mojkovac ridges, Uloševina and Razvršje, on Christmas Eve, although he might easily have been informed by telephone that this was only part of a general, final attack. On the previous day the Austrians had been on Cer Mountain; their patrols had had a brush with the Montenegrins at Lepenac, a valley and stream that separate Cer from the Mojkovac defile. The Serdar's surprise was evident from his order for the counterattack; it was brief and laid down that Cer itself was to be taken. In this sense it was unrealistic: to capture Cer would have been a serious operation for which the Montenegrins had not the

superior force needed. But there was something fundamentally sound in it: determination to resist. In this respect the order was beyond reproach—terse, clear, realistic, and noble.

The Serdar issued this order between January 6 and 7. He liked to be orderly, and on all more important matters he would issue written instructions, usually very short, in addition to holding a verbal briefing and conference with his subordinate commanders.

The order was dated from Kolašin. But there are still men living who remember that he was at Mojkovac during those days and spent the night at Podbišće, in the house of Gavro Radenović.

When Montenegro acquired the new territories after 1878, the Moslem population fled or was driven from them. The Montenegrin state distributed their abandoned holdings, and it was in this way that Gavro came to possess his house and land at Podbišće, a village opposite Mojkovac. In addition to this property, he bought another with a house on the hill, a fine, ancient building. The lower story, used as a storehouse, was of masonry, and the upper was built of oak logs trimmed smooth and dovetailed at the corners. The window and door frames were carved, and the roof was high-pitched. The house had three rooms, a large one facing the village and the mountain and two smaller ones at the side.

At the time of the battle of Mojkovac, Gavro's was the most comfortable house in the district, and also the only one in which one could pass the night without being devoured by bugs. Gavro was a man of substance, and his wife was of cleanly habits and a skilled cook. So the Serdar stayed in this house. His retinue, few in number—he did not like a large following—lodged in neighboring houses.

Having been informed of the enemy's preparations for

an attack, the Serdar had arrived on horseback from Kolašin the day before, and had summoned a conference of his senior officers for Christmas Eve.

War is war. The Serdar had to cut his Yule log where chance allowed. Early in the morning, before the day had yet broken, he went with his host and his suite up the hill—there was woodland right above the tower—and cut and brought home a log of oak. But as they were coming back, at about eight o'clock, the din of battle started beyond the hill, and in spite of the falling snow re-echoed loudly along the slopes of Mojkovac. The house was sheltered by the hill, but stray bullets whistled through the village and, if visibility had been better, the Austrian guns might perhaps have hit the school at Podbišće and the batteries nearby.

Soon after, reports came in that the Austrians had driven in the outposts from Lepenac and had broken through at their heels onto the Mojkovac slopes, capturing two key points—Razvršje and Uloševina—while a third—Mjedeno Guvno—remained in Montenegrin hands. News also arrived from patrols in the enemy's rear of the movement of stronger forces from Bijelo Polje and Šahovići: the enemy was massing for further penetrations or for a decisive battle.

Day and night for the last fortnight all the roads had been swarming with hundreds of horses carrying supplies and rations. Soldiers and conscripted peasantry had continually kept the road from Plevlja to Čajnik clear of snow, and carts and trucks had plied incessantly along it. The war machine of the great empire was rolling unerringly on, and now its impetus was directed at the heights of Mojkovac and the Tara Valley. An orderly came galloping from Kolašin on a sweating horse and handed the Serdar a dispatch. Was it the summons to Cetinje or a re-

port of the opening of the enemy offensive on the two other fronts?

About ten o'clock assembled the senior officers for whom the Serdar had sent before the Austrians had taken the Mojkovac heights. The Serdar was rather reticent, especially in regard to military matters, in the presence of those who were not immediately concerned, even if they were officers. Nevertheless, he was unable to hide his perturbation and anxiety, even without the message from Cetinje and the morning's penetration by the enemy of such a crucial position. He quickly brightened up, however, when the situation was explained to him. His commanders had not been greatly surprised by what had happened, nor, on the other hand, did they underrate the importance of the Mojkovac heights. They did not know the exact day and hour when the Austrians would attack, but they were expecting an attack to take place. The main body of the Montenegrin force could not be stationed on the slopes of Mojkovac; it would have been exposed to artillery fire and it would not have had any more permanent position to move to. Units had at an earlier stage been concentrated around Mojkovac, ready to counterattack at once. The Serdar could gather from the looks of his commanding officers that their fighting spirit had not diminished, but had, rather, grown—they were calm and controlled, although a certain concealed, obscure indignation was evident. Against Austria? Or because of the inadequate supplies, particularly of ammunition? Or because of the attitude of the higher authorities toward the continuation of the war? But even this was cleared up during lunch.

The Serdar was, in fact, the only one who had lunch, since he was in a hurry. The rest—the ten commanding officers—had a snack of sour cabbage and dried fruit.

Christmas Eve was a fast day in the army, as in the nation at large. His host and hostess had not imagined for a

moment that the Serdar would perhaps not fast, and had prepared a fast-day lunch for him, too: some trout, caught in the hatcheries overnight, had been hastily fried. The Serdar did not care much for brandy, so his orderly brought him a bottle of wine from the saddlebags. Without offering anything to the others, the Serdar ate slowly and with enjoyment.

Somebody remarked that the Austrians could not get through this way until the summer unless they made a breakthrough from some other side. The Serdar made no reply, although the remark had obviously been directed at him.

Having construed his silence as answering in effect, "Look to your front!," Captain Stojan Stanković could not refrain from saying, "We all hope that, if it comes to the worst, the Montenegrin Army will follow in the steps of the Serbian."

The silence dragged on, painfully, because everyone expected a rough reply from the Serdar.

The war had upset the attitude of awe and respect that had hitherto prevailed toward the court and all that came from Cetinje, and the common disaster with Serbia had given rise to open talk of union between the two states. Such talk was particularly lively on this front. The soldiers fighting there were mostly from the territories liberated in 1876 and were consequently less bound to the separate statehood of Montenegro than the "Old Montenegrins"—those from the neighborhood of Cetinje and from the four "original provinces." Apart from this, they had been fighting the whole time alongside the Serbians of the Užice detachment, and this had brought them closer to each other. It was not that they had become opponents of a separate Montenegrin state but that, now that they had got to know the Serbians through the Užice men and through settlers from that part of the country, it seemed ridiculous to talk

of supposed national differences; these men from Užice were perhaps closer to them than the "Old Montenegrins."

The court and the government could no longer prevent the public expression of this longing for union with Serbia, nor did they do so, at least not openly. It was known that there had been earlier negotiations regarding union between the two governments, as well as between the two courts, already linked by marriage; there had been some dispute as to which dynasty was to be considered the older, how union was to be effected, and what the future status of Montenegro was to be. Now all that had been pushed into the background in the face of the disaster that had struck both sides. The war had revealed all the senselessness of continuing to have two small Serb states, one beside the other, when even in partnership they were unable to stand against the monstrous forces around them. But even if such thoughts were beginning to find utterance, it was still dangerous to cast doubt on official policy, let alone oppose it openly.

The Serdar knew and thought well of this rash, tall, swarthy captain with the blue eyes that blinked before no one. It might have been expected, and everyone did expect, that the Serdar would cut him short with "Mind your battalion and Mojkovac, and leave high politics to those whose business it is." But the Serdar continued to behave as if he had heard nothing. This made the silence even more uncomfortable, and Captain Stojan, unable to endure it, exploded in response to the words the Serdar had not spoken: "My Serb patriotism is as great as any man's."

It was well known that the Serdar was perfectly capable of restraining both his words and his thoughts; but this was beyond the limit he allowed anyone. He was equally capable of flaring up with a word that left no possible reply.

But the Serdar said nothing, nothing.

He was as much a politician as he was a soldier, and he may have concluded: Why inflame these disputes and exasperate soldiers who will be plunging in their own blood, and to their deaths, perhaps tomorrow?

Another officer, Mašan Janković, came forward. "The real hero is the man who, when he is in trouble, does not shout 'Run for your life!'—not the man who dashes into action." In this, Mašan was hitting at Stojan's reckless heroism in battle, and also at his impatient political talk.

Stojan would certainly not have left his adversary unanswered, but he was stopped by a look from the Serdar, as stern and calm as ever but astonishingly mild in its reproach. He fixed this look first on Stojan, then on Mašan, then on Stojan once more. There it was. The young men were already quarreling in his presence. So long as the talk had been of fighting, they had all been of one mind, with no objections raised; but as soon as it touched on the Serb Idea and its destiny, there was strife, quarreling, bitterness, and hate. Accusations and mistrust spread all over the country, down to the last soldier, to the most remote hut. Yet the battle had to be fought; the Serbs, the dynasty, Montenegro, and history had to be saved. But with what? With whom? And how?

If the Serdar felt apprehension or anger or malice, he must have stifled them. Nobody uttered another word, even in a whisper.

Having finished his lunch, the Serdar carefully brushed the crumbs from the edge into the middle of the table, shook those on his clothes into the palm of his hand and added them to those already on the table. In this he was the peasant who considers it a sin to waste bread. Then he slowly got up and began to make ready for his journey. Mašan held his greatcoat, and Stojan attached his sword. The two were the first to rise, perhaps because they had

felt the desire to move most urgently and surely because they were affected most keenly by the silence their outbursts had caused.

As the Serdar was going out, he was stopped by his host, a tall man, gray-haired and slightly stooping, who, in a deep voice and in words he had carefully thought out, begged him to lay his Yule log now (the logs are normally laid in the evening), to the good luck of the whole Montenegrin Army. The Serdar took the log.

In the kitchen the Serdar's daughter, Vasilija, a beautiful, fair girl who had received some education and often accompanied her father on campaigns, was gossiping inquisitively with the women and prying into their affairs. She found it all excessively interesting: these women were from Plav, in Old Serbia, and dressed and cooked in a different way. They were glad to reply to her questions, while restraining their laughter at the young lady's extraordinary costume—breeches and high boots. They got up and withdrew to one side as soon as the Serdar appeared in the doorway carrying the Christmas log.

The silence from the room transferred itself to this place and grew even more tense: everyone stiffened, waiting for the Serdar to say something, perhaps something very significant, as he laid the log. But he was no speechmaker, though he had a sense of humor and a feeling for great occasions.

The fire on the hearth suddenly blazed up and then subsided while thousands of sparks streamed upward. The Serdar sprinkled the log with wine from a glass and drank off the rest with the words: "You Highlanders and Hercegovinians like long toasts, but I am going to give you a short one. Good luck to everything Serb, and God grant that this Christmas be remembered forever!" Then, as he went out, he said to no one in particular and to everyone in general: "Let the men eat meat today; they mustn't go

into action hungry. And tell the priests that I will take all the sin on my own soul!"

After that the Serdar went into the garden to take his leave of the officers, shaking hands with each individually and hugging his host. Snow was still falling. There was a dumb silence around Mojkovac. The horses were brought. The Serdar did not want his groom to hold the stirrup on the other side, and in spite of his weight mounted lightly into the saddle. "Good-by! Good luck!" He looked back once more.

His daughter, too, mounted lightly, then turned up and buttoned her black fur collar and, from shortened stirrups, gripped the horse with her round knees. She was indeed a beautiful woman, slim and straight, pale in her black clothes and with black twisted eyebrows, tall in build and firm-breasted. She was provocative, too, on a spirited horse, in a low-crowned cap of rabbit's fur and a riding dress through which the fresh curves showed. Yet no one seemed to notice her proud good looks or her warm, pervasive charm.

Miloš Medenica also mounted, to see the Serdar off. The party trotted down the slope. Balls of snow flew sparkling on all sides from under the horses' hoofs. The officers continued standing in the garden until the Serdar and his party had reached the road and vanished through the village. Then they, too, started to mount, although the master of the house would have liked them to stay; their lunch was ready. But they were in a hurry; there were orders to be passed on with all speed and units to be made ready with all that would be needed for the battle.

The story goes that at their parting in the village of Sjerogošte, the Serdar asked Medenica: "Will you hold out, you son of heroes?" And that Medenica made no reply, but whipped his horse around and galloped off.

Five or six hundred yards upstream from Mojkovac, on the left, Montenegrin, bank of the Tara, just above the stone bridge, beneath a spur of the slope that comes straight down from the Sinjajevina massif, stands a small house with an upper story of wattle that used to be called Simo's, and later Paljok's Inn, after its respective owners.

The original owner, an officer named Simo Terić, had clearly aimed at both beauty and utility when he built this house. At this point the valley of the Lower Fields ends, and the hills and narrows around the Tara begin. On the opposite bank of the Tara, Bjelâšica rises steeply from the terraced sides of Mojkovac, with its bare, rounded tops, emerging from the thick woods, glistening against the sky. In whichever direction a traveler was going, whether down to the Fields or away from them, across the Tara or into Sandžak, he was bound to strike through this gorge and to the inn, tucked behind a screen of fruit trees and limes, yet so near the river that its sound was always audible and so near the road that the traveler could not help noticing its walls even if they had not been whitewashed.

The clear, swift river, the white house, and the green treetops were a joy to the eye. Actually, the house could not have been set back any farther, since the mountain-side began right behind it. All the same, it took intelligence and originality to build it just there—at the cross-roads, with a view of the river and the mountain and Mojkovac, with its Turkish watchtower whose round turrets stood out from everything else in the neighborhood, reflections from a foreign world. To look fine and to have a fine view—that is very Montenegrin; but to get close to the river, to live with it, that is Moslem. Were not both these combined in this inn? And were they not also an expression of its owner's character?

He was an unforgettable person. Simo Terić had nothing of the trader about him, so his house was not a real inn. He lived in it with his family. It was not possible to spend the night there; one could only buy drink, and oats and hay for the baggage train. Simo's wife ran the inn, while he, like other clan leaders, supervised his property and talked with other men when he was not actually keeping watch on the frontier.

Short and sturdily built, of a tough and obstinate temper, ferociously brave, Simo was a man who talked little, but was always ready for action or a fight. He could be hospitable to extravagance, and yet was thrifty and hard-working. A man of keen intelligence, he was quick to discover what was possible and advantageous; at the same time he was quite prepared to cast all consideration aside and wreck everything when honor or pride were at stake.

Such were most of the other leading men of his day—they combined a touchy sensitivity with a keen interest in trade and the acquisition of lands. But usually one of these opposite qualities came to predominate in time. In Simo they were sundered, each by itself, as if he were two different people, vying with one another on and off. He passionately loved his sons, as most Montenegrins do; but he could be rough with them. When they grew up and had finished their schooling, they had the deepest respect for his fatherly care, for his intelligence and his adroitness, but they feared his quick-tempered, haughty disposition.

In the battle of Mojkovac his inn served as a meeting place for officers. It would have been exposed to fire if the Austrians had managed to establish themselves on the Mojkovac heights and aim their artillery at it. But it was impossible to settle on Mojkovac; the windows and floors of the watchtower had been looted already and there was little in the way of houses—two or three log huts. The Mos-

lems had fled from it and the Montenegrins had not yet dug themselves in properly.

On this Christmas Eve, after their conference with the Serdar, the officers gathered in Simo's inn, waiting for Medenica to return and discuss with them the details of the next day's counterattack. Also, it was easier for them to keep in touch with their units from there, and they could drink and have a snack.

Nobody got drunk. There were no drunkards among them. Nevertheless, a certain intoxication did grip them, and that not merely from a restlessness before action, in the face of death.

Hard words and solemn thoughts strove against each other. Words blazed like fire, thoughts flashed out. But no one drew pistol or sword. Their sheathed weapons were kept for the morrow and for some later, inevitable, and more proper encounter. There were pistols of all kinds; the swords were Russian, heavy, and in black leather scabbards, hung over the greatcoats, which had likewise come from Russia. But it did not matter where the arms had come from. Any weapon was good and welcome if it would kill when there was killing to be done.

Was that the beginning of the battle among the Montenegrins themselves?

All battles begin first of all among those who then have to wage them against the enemy.

6

The quarrel among the officers was all the more vehement in that it was conducted piecemeal: a sentence or a written instruction to an orderly followed by the answer to one's adversary.

As always on such occasions, the ringleaders were few—

Stojan and Mašan. And Petar Žurić, a lieutenant of the Reserve, also took a lively part, but in a different way from the other two—leisurely and, as it were, casually, incidentally. He was a frank, cheerful fellow by nature, though not a boisterous one. He, too, was of the younger men who had had their education abroad—if Belgrade and Serbia were to be counted as foreign parts—and had been gripped by the movement for parliamentary liberties and for union with Serbia.

These two ideas, freedom and union, were one at the time in the minds of these young Montenegrins, since Serbia was a constitutional country, and one of the most democratic in the world at that, while Montenegro was an absolute monarchy, all the more senseless and ridiculous because it boasted of its patriarchal character. They knew, of course, that the two ideas were not identical. The unionist movement had proclaimed itself before Serbia became democratic and anti-Austrian. Democracy had given this movement a new impulse and a new significance.

Petar belonged to the school of thought that wanted union both for its own sake and for that of liberty, and even identified the two. Arrested and sentenced for his beliefs, he was released with other political offenders before the 1912 war. It was a fine gesture of the old Montenegrin King to release his opponents to fight for their homeland. In the war with Turkey Petar started as a private; but wars followed one after another and dragged on, and efficient men were scarce, so he was promoted to the rank of an officer.

The confusion among the Montenegrin authorities over the Austrian war did not surprise him. He knew well, with the unerring knowledge that comes from one's own painful experience, how ruthless, violent, and selfish Montenegrin officialdom had become. He got to know its bad side, its essence, in its prisons—the place where every government

and every system shows itself as it is, with no adornments and no big words, without its past glories or its future ideals, through the daily contact between prisoners and jailers. Such were the dungeons of Jusovača at Podgorica, a prison inherited from the Turks, hot in summer and dank in winter, filthy and bug-ridden and without a scrap of sun, with forty-pound fetters, a morsel of corn and a crock of water, with no beds, no medicine, and no doctors, with illiterate military policemen as warders and semi-literate officers, and both, seniors and subordinates alike, heated and drunk with bacon, mutton, brandy, violence, and sound sleep, experts at waving his treason under his nose night and day, at teaching him how to circle the prison yard and behave respectfully to them and to love his country, which for them was identical with the ruler's omnipotence and with themselves. All of them were prepared to justify and extol as the highest wisdom the ruler's begging of aid from Russia, Austria, Turkey, or wherever he could get it, and at the same time to cry shame on Žurić as a mercenary because he loved Serbia and felt it to be his own country and wanted, unconditionally, the union of all Serbs. In Montenegro, where blows and abuse were considered grievous and unforgivable insults, it had since 1909 been the custom to employ wet ropes, jack boots, and rifle butts in the interrogation of political offenders, to pull noses and mustaches, to curse fathers and grandfathers. He could not feel surprise at anything that might be done by an authority that neither knew nor desired any other end than the continuance of its own power.

But in this dispute, too, he was aloof. It was not that he was afraid; he was that sort of man, reserved and uncommunicative. Tall, thin, and stiff, with broad, slightly stooping shoulders, large fists, and long, sinewy legs, he gave the impression of being one of those strong men who are reluctant to exert their strength. His brown hair and

his thin mustaches had blond streaks in them, his eyes were yellowish brown, his features gentle; he could have been taken for a mild man were it not for his thin, pale, tightly pressed lips. He spoke little and deliberately, especially when the talk was of politics. He had learned to be careful of what he said, a hard and grievous lesson for a talkative man such as he had once been.

He was doing now the obvious and practicable thing—fighting with all his heart against the Austrians. The ideal of union shone out for him after the fall of Serbia with an even lovelier, more tragic brilliance. But union did not seem to have become any more unattainable because of Serbia's ruin, although he was quite unable to explain to himself why. Of course it was not merely because he had faith—men cannot exist unless they have faith—but he felt that the forces of the Serbian nation were not exhausted in spite of the appalling losses and collapse of Serbia. They consisted, as it were, not in the number of fighting men, but in a relentless resistance.

But however deeply this faith—or, rather, this sentiment of the nation's strength—was rooted in him and, in some obscure way, justified, he had, too, a belief in democracy which was no less naïve and sincere. He had in his head a mixture of what he had acquired—Western liberal doctrines and Serbian parliamentarianism—and what he had inherited—the patriarchal harmony and equality of the family group and the tribe. This mixture did not strike him as either unnatural or artificial. He was deeply convinced that the Serbs were democrats by nature, so to speak, and that outside influences alone, combined with the selfishness of certain individuals, particularly rulers, were to blame if there had not always been freedom in the Serbian states. As soon as the Serbian nation grew strong and united, people would yield to their natural inclination for freedom and all denials of freedom would cease to exist.

Although he had passed through prisons—or perhaps because he had—and had learned there that every ideal, once realized, loses its ideal quality and is usually transformed into a monstrosity and a tyranny, he still held to his conviction that freedom—parliamentary democracy—could settle everything, since it sprang from the natural desire of human communities for diversity and competition and made possible their unimpeded, inevitable progress. Although he knew from his own experience that the Serbian nation and especially the Montenegrins were practically devoid of any civic conscience and democratic traditions and how easily—even with what cowardice—they surrender to strong government, still he maintained all the more obstinately that for Serbs, for Yugoslavs, liberal parliamentary democracy was not only the best, but the only, solution.

In fact, he himself felt an inexhaustible love and respect for people, so that these moral principles were interwoven with his political views and were even transformed into them without his realizing it. His own inner need to be good and well disposed to other human beings he understood as the natural need of humans to be free and respected. And since he lived in a period when his countrymen were struggling for liberation and union, his moral attitude and his views harmonized with the nation's interest and aims and with his own partiality for them. Therefore he was always amazed when confronted with a Serb who was indifferent toward democracy as he understood it.

In his private life Petar Žurić was the same. He loved his wife, a Serbian girl, devotedly and with deep respect; but he did not avoid intimacy with other women, of course, if it was a question of genuine, overwhelming passion. He saw no incompatibility in this: one was love and marriage, and the other was a wider, fuller dispensation of love. He was quick to form close and devoted friendships with

people of similar outlook, and it was with pain and deep shock that he parted company with them as soon as their views ceased to coincide.

He was now deputizing for his battalion commander, Mališa Petrović, an elderly man, uneducated and semi-literate, who had acquired his rank and position by hereditary right in his clan. Except for his personal bravery, Mališa was unfit to command the unit. He was, in fact, an officer of the so-called National Army, which dated from before the time when a cadre of regular officers and leaders, having education of a sort, began to be formed and when men began to be given systematic instruction.

Mališa was in many respects conscious of his own limitations. He took his second-in-command around with him everywhere, and even called him his son: "Look here, Pero my son, you'll do this better than I, Pero my son." Still, even if he was incapable of training or administering the unit, when it came to a battle Mališa could do some things better than anybody else. He was bony and somewhat short of stature, with thick grizzled mustaches which he allowed to droop in disarray. At the toughest moments in action, he would shout to the battalion with his penetrating voice, unexpectedly powerful for such a meager frame; he would call on his company commanders loudly by name, entreating and rallying them with old-style, peculiarly Montenegrin expressions, which were beginning to sound ridiculous, particularly in the army.

A strange special relationship sprang up between Petar and Mališa. A passionate and unhesitating supporter of everything pertaining to the ruler and everything that came from his entourage, Mališa had at first regarded Petar as a secret conspirator and as a traitor to the centuries-old struggle for Serb liberation. But Petar's behavior in action quickly taught him that Petar was a good Montenegrin and Serb, though an opponent of the dynasty. Mališa had

to reject the thought of treason in connection with this man who never flinched at death and had no other dream but the Serb dream. Gradually, in the light of life's realities and in contact with the living man, he gained confidence in Petar in all that related to the war, action in the field, and military leadership; but he remained on his guard—a confidential whisper had come to him from above—about his second-in-command's attitude toward the dynasty.

It took time for Petar, too, to understand his commander. Every thought in Mališa's head was crammed with Serb aspirations. But he did not have the modern idea of a nation, only something instinctive—a spirit, a passion, inherited from the ancient past with the language and its ballads, something by which he lived and which would live on in him until he handed it on uncontaminated to his children.

Petar himself had known this kind of Serb sentiment in earlier days, but his long and close contact with Mališa enabled him to grasp the depth and meaning of it. Although he himself was passionately devoted to the Serb and Yugoslav Idea, Petar felt that this illiterate, coarse, crafty, and vain old man, quite at sea in the modern world, was more deeply and completely imbued with the Serb Idea than he was. To Mališa this idea was not a set of acquired notions; still less was it a policy applicable at this or that time. It was the man himself, as he lived, thought, and acted. If it came to proving their Serb convictions under torture, Petar felt, he himself would be ready to lay down his life deliberately, but for Mališa a question of deliberate resistance or the like would never arise: he would consider it natural to die for his belief, as people live and as they die in general.

Petar's Serb convictions were the highest possible conscious moral duty—a sacred obligation. Mališa slept and woke as a Serb. His Serb convictions were neither an ethic

nor a duty; they were just something that every living Serb ought to have, whereas a duty was something that came by habit and instruction, something he was ordered to do and was not dishonorable, and that therefore had to be carried out.

From this growing acquaintance with each other through the hardships of war, their relationship developed. Mališa forbore to touch on Petar's antagonism, as Petar did on Mališa's attachment, to the dynasty and its policy. Working together on what was common to them both gradually led them even to make jokes at the expense of what stood between them.

For this reason their part in the dispute was neither fiery nor significant. The two of them had no unsettled accounts, either with each other or with any of the rest.

7

Stojan and Mašan had no grounds for quarrel either; but both of them, in the grip of political passion, believed that they had some, and even many, reasons for quarreling. What is more, they felt at times that their quarrel arose from personal wrongs and was inflamed by them. Their former friendship, which had been known in the whole region, turned during these last few years into an intolerance so rabid that their former intimacy seemed like mere hypocrisy.

From fathers who had been renowned heroes, they had inherited both their heroism and their friendship. Mašan's father had been a captain of frontiersmen. On his raids into Turkey he had found support and shelter with Stojan's father, a well-to-do farmer of a rebellious temper, who helped in the secret slaughter of Turks. Just before the war of 1876, he openly raised a revolt in his district,

wiped out the begs and the Turkish authorities, and himself assumed the captaincy of the region, at first to spur into rebellion, and later on to restrain, peasants who had grown used to an unbridled liberty.

The comradeship, the brotherhood, indeed, of the fathers had drawn together the two sons, as if they had been of the same family; and thereafter, quite irrespective of their fathers, the ties between them grew closer and closer. They were inseparable at the School for Noncommissioned Officers in Cetinje, and their friendship had been especially reinforced by joint expeditions on leave, by boyish confidences and incitements. Later on, in their homes, which were again inseparable although so far apart, there came common joys and sorrows—marriages, births, and deaths—which brought them still closer. Even their separation in the service could not weaken their friendship. Stojan became a frontier officer in his home district; but the less often they saw each other, the more their friendship blazed up again at each new meeting. It became something of a legend, and people were amazed if on a market day or holiday they met one without the other.

The deterioration in their relationship was not sudden, and admitting it to themselves was an agonizing process.

Looking back, it seemed to Stojan that Mašan had always been slow and susceptible to every influence from Cetinje, even when not in accord with them. He remembered a number of statements and incidents that confirmed this. No, it could not be said that he had been a bootlicker, but he had considered the men at the top wise and had thought it his duty as an officer to obey and his duty as a man not to stand apart from the majority. To Mašan, on the other hand, it was now clear that in Stojan, so hasty and impetuous in everything, there had always been something unstable, not to say fickle and heedless. True, their friendship had been unselfish and powerful; but there it was,

and Stojan would not, or could not, sacrifice to it a single particle of his opinions.

Until the time of those unfortunate political trials, the first at Cetinje in 1908 and the second at Kolašin, the differences between them had scarcely been noticeable. Stojan would fasten onto some fact relating to the court or its entourage—some unreasonably arbitrary act of the King's or the threats or overtures of one of the young princes conveyed by his bodyguards to some woman widely known to be beautiful. Mašan did not contest, nor did he approve, such proceedings, but he considered them to be mere insignificant trifles compared with what the dynasty and the ruler had achieved and had still to achieve for Montenegro and the Serb cause. Differences were freely expressed; each brought out his thoughts and comments before the other. This was not because freedom of speech was growing in Montenegro; on the contrary, there was not the least hope that King Nikola would achieve greatness by renouncing his absolute power. The two men knew each other so well that there was no question of betrayal, even if they expressed their most secret thoughts.

But their different attitudes did not make any really serious breach in their friendship until the "Bombs Case." The trial of this case at Cetinje parted them with a blade of ice, although they had already been separated and grown distant because of the Kolašin case.

To the young Montenegrins educated at Belgrade under the leadership of the bold and inspiring Marko Daković, the idea quickly came that the despotism and selfishness of the Petrović dynasty in Montenegro were a hindrance to the unification of all Serbs and all Yugoslavs. This was emphasized at that time because Turkey was still in the Balkans and lay between the two Serb Balkan states, while Austria had already settled in Bosnia and was determined to stifle any longings for Serbian unification because they

were bound to strike at Austria's own internal weakness. Movements had already started for the separation of the Serbs and Croats from Austria, and even of the Slovenes and other Slavs. In addition, Belgrade was democratically minded, with extremely active conspiratorial organizations, which the government tolerated and at times even egged on.

A group of youths had sent bombs to Cetinje to be used in attacks on the court and government. It was all organized in a naïve and makeshift manner and seemed more an outburst of youthful spleen than a deep-laid operation. The bombs were discovered, and hit, so to speak, the relations between Belgrade and Cetinje. Vienna, with its spies, its diplomats, and its press, quickly threw itself into this breach, aiding Cetinje against Belgrade. Cetinje, isolated and indignant, did not reject this ill-intentioned support. Passions and controversies flared up. No one was executed, but the court camarilla magnified the Bombs Case to put an end to the liberties already granted, while Austria-Hungary did likewise, not only in order to strike at the Yugoslav movement, but in order to strengthen its influence over the Montenegrin authorities.

Stojan did not defend the attempt itself or its perpetrators, although he, too, had been dazzled by Daković's brilliance. But he blamed the court for the pro-Austrian and anti-Serb feeling which this occasion had brought clearly to light. Nobody had the right to be anti-Serb; otherwise the attempt itself could be given a justification. Mašan, on the other hand, was shocked by the patriotism of Serbs who wished to undermine the most patriotically Serb of ruling houses.

Their opposed standpoints at once took on a moral aspect. Surely the court had a right, to the best of its ability and even with the help of Vienna, to protect itself from crime? How could one Serb, fighting against another, rely

on the help of his bitterest enemy, who was engaged in rooting up the Serb and Yugoslav creed and race?

And Mašan suddenly realized how great, how fatal Stojan's chief weakness was—his passion for women, which until then had struck Mašan as trifling and even as attractive and human. Not only could Stojan not resist a pretty woman, but if he could not get a pretty one, he would take anyone he could get. Tall, with well-braced limbs, a powerful chest, a long, muscular neck, he appealed to women, to Montenegrin women. He was conscious of his charm, and he proceeded at once to tell a woman of his desire for her, without fear and without hesitation. Not just Mašan, but other men, too, even better-looking men than Stojan, were amazed at the speed with which Stojan became friendly with women and conquered them. Was not this flirtatious disposition of Stojan's an obvious confirmation of his fickle character, of his political instability?

On his side, Stojan began to see in Mašan—that short, freckled, fair-haired young man, who concealed under a cover of honorable conduct and aloofness his inability to win a woman, to enjoy the sweetest of the passions and to rejoice in God's noblest creation—a weakling and a coward. Wasn't this reserve toward women a further confirmation of his lack of courage in facing the truth and acknowledging that the court, and the ruler, too, were stuck in the anti-Serb bog, to the shame of Montenegro and of their own past?

And once they began revising and reappraising their thinking, a new and different picture emerged.

The Kolašin affair involved the plotting of a rebellion. It was not more efficiently or skillfully planned than the plot in the Bombs Case. The organization was uncovered right at the beginning. Stojan, with enthusiasm, and Mašan, unwillingly, took part in the interrogation of the suspects. When the five accused men were shot, Stojan was

horrified, while Mašan held that the sentence had been inevitable, but too severe. Heading their respective units on the way back from the execution, which they had both attended on orders, they were either silent or else turned the conversation to other matters, feeling, indeed knowing without a word spoken, that the firing squads that morning had shot down their own friendship as well.

Time dragged on for them with agonizing slowness. Yet Stojan was surprised when, after less than an hour's ride down the Tara, they arrived at Mašan's home; it was as if he were there for the first time and as if the journey had been completed too quickly.

From that side of the river, Mašan's house, in a garden above the village, looked yellow. Stojan found the memory of it at once dear and painful. They halted at the rock above the bridge. Here the road divided—over the bridge to Mašan's village, down the Tara to Stojan's house. The thought came into Stojan's mind: I can't ever remember coming this way without turning off to Mašan's house. And now he seems to be hesitating whether to invite me, and I don't even feel like visiting!

The Tara ran beneath them now with a murmuring at its falls and dark-blue patches in its eddies; the day was clear and the hilltops were green against the sky. Stojan saw their friendship now as a blue and shining day like this. Yet at the same time this glorious day, the clear river, the clear sky, and the green clashed with the morning's execution and added to the torment it had created in him.

Mašan was indeed hesitating, but only, as he explained later, for fear that he would make things worse for his friend in this unsettled mood if he did not leave him to master his distress by himself. Nevertheless, he did, in the end, invite him.

Stojan declined without hesitation. "I can't, I'm in a hurry. I've a lot of work to do at home, and there's the

frontier duty, as you know." He shook the reins for his horse to go on, but the animal refused—he was used to turning off to Mašan's house. At one and the same time Stojan became aware that he had not told the truth and that he ought to say: "How can I come? Everything seems bloody to me—you and the earth and the sky. I hated myself, too, when I saw those poor fellows shot down this morning at Breza. Did you hear them, Mašan, hailing the Serb Idea and Montenegro?"

As if he heard nothing, Mašan invited him again: "Do come. Hasn't my house always been yours?" But getting no reply, he suddenly, almost angrily, led his horse down the cobbles and onto the bridge.

Stojan spurred his horse as if flying from something fearful. He dashed out of the gorge and in a moment found himself in a little valley. The gentle tapping of the horse's hoofs, the green of the meadow, and the pale blue of the sky down the river in the cleft of the hill struck his eye and jolted him to his senses. He shivered, and something hard, hot, and painful tightened in his belly. He pulled up the horse and looked across the river after Mašan, who had already crossed the bridge and was climbing up the slope, riding at ease. He stood out very clearly, on his white horse, against the green hillside. Would he turn? Would he wave a greeting?

Mašan did not look back.

Stojan journeyed on for four hours, down the river, every bend of which he knew and always rediscovered with fresh joy. He met faces known and unknown, he stopped at inns, drank, treated, but later on he could not remember either where he had been or what he had seen—an unknown land, strange people. An old friendship had crumbled within him, and the whole of his youth, transforming the joy and brightness of memories into pain and shame; a whole world had been overturned from its foun-

dations—his world, the world in which he had believed in spite of its failings. It would mend, it would be better. But now Serbs were at odds with each other. Good Serbs were dying at Serb hands. And Mašan was on the other side—with the criminals.

Mašan could not settle down at his farm that day, although he loved working there. He did not notice his wife or his children or his neighbors; he could find no peace, no work on which he could dwell. They thought he was restless after witnessing the executions, although he was no longer thinking of them. He made up his mind for the hundredth time: But Stojan has betrayed our friendship, trampled on the allegiance of our fathers and of the whole of our youth. He is simply distorted. And as for those women of his, it's just common loose living.

Mountains don't come together after they have separated; nor do people. Each keeps to his own.

No one knew the real reasons for their estrangement, and they kept silent, saying neither good nor bad things about each other. The wars tossed them in different directions but brought them together in battle. Such encounters were cold, as if they were ashamed of their former love. When their battalions had to co-operate, they made conspicuous efforts to help each other.

Stojan did not become a rebel. He withdrew into himself and carried out his duty in an impetuous, uncontrollable way. But from the day of that fatal upheaval—that bright day of the executions, with its events and its consequences—thoughts had taken shape in his mind that war and action and the misfortunes of Serbia had further sharpened and that now, on the eve of battle, came pouring forth in naked passion and pure bitterness of heart.

Something similar, although of a different nature, was happening to Mašan.

The war had finally driven them into fighting not merely

shoulder to shoulder, but hand in hand, to mingle their blood, in the frost and the snowdrifts, in the ultimate battle for the last scrap of Serb soil.

If it had not been for this Serb Idea and if this had not been its decisive moment, they would have gone on helping each other coolly and conscientiously as they had done before. But was it in fact only the Serb Idea that was at stake for Cetinje, for Stojan, for Mašan, and for the refugee Serbian government?

8

This could be said, and was said, in sum, by Captain and Battalion Commander Stojan Stanković, at Terić's inn, on Christmas Eve:

"I am a soldier and a Serb.

"It would be sufficient to say that I am one of these two things, since whoever is not a soldier today is not a Serb.

"I shall do my duty as I always have, and I shall let no man's foot tread before mine where men struggle for life. But I should like to know, I have a right to know, as I am wading deep into the deadly fire, do the leading men at Cetinje think that they are fighting to the last? Are they capable of appreciating the fearful glory and disaster of Serbia, or must we strew Bjelašica here with corpses just to raise the price for the striking of a shameful bargain with Austria?

"I know that a soldier may not, must not, ask questions. And I have not done it through so many battles. But we have reached a point where we are dying for we know not whom or what. For Montenegro, for the Serb cause! So long as it is not to aid a settlement with the foreigner! Now I must ask the question, even though I know there is no answer. I am leading my fellow clansmen, men of Serb

blood, to the slaughter, and I am torn by doubts, not that their blood may be shed in vain—human blood is never shed in vain—but that their blood may be used to smooth the path to betrayal.

“What is the Austrian, what is the Magyar, compared with home-bred villainy?

“What is sweeter than to tear the life out of the enemy, to dance over his dead body, get drunk on his blood? Yet I would sooner draw my sword and turn my guns on our enemies at home, on the renegades who lead us into this dance of death to save their own shameful authority and their rotten rule so that they might foul the Serb name over and over again with their treachery. A spoonful of traitor’s blood would be sweeter to me at tomorrow’s Christmas communion than to have another Danube full of German and Hungarian blood all the way from Vienna and Pest to Belgrade.

“Are we accursed, above every other nation, that we can never be without our traitors?

“Why must a Serb be such a brute as to trample on everything men hold sacred as soon as he smells power and riches?

“I have no more trust in God or Heaven. They would by now have had mercy on us and opened the bottomless pit beneath everything that bore the Serb name, so as not to make our name a word of reproach before the world, and allow the enemy to gloat over our shame.

“What is justice when one cannot reach it? What is truth when it remains unknown? What use is the sun when it warms only dishonored slaves?

“All this plotting is going on in the darkness of eclipse. There is whispering on all sides. We know nothing, we can do nothing.

“There is no choice but to grapple with the Austrians

tomorrow and acquit ourselves well on these hills, so that at least it will be known that Montenegro did not give in without a fight.

"You trust in the ruler's good sense to devise how best we can survive for a time and save a foot's span of Serb earth, so that the fire on the Serb hearth is not put out after having been kept alight with so much toil and pain after five centuries of slavery. The Serbs begin to be split into pieces; but who can split his own soul? If the Serbs had gone to sleep in the monasteries and towns of Montenegro, they would have ceased to exist. What are the Serbs without Serbia, without Bosnia, without the Vojvodina? What are they without the Serb Idea? A mass of nameless, fettered slaves.

"Do not have vain hopes. Once the Austrian has set his power in motion, he will not allow the Cetinje leaders to cheat him and parade their Serb Idea. Not under any circumstances will he let them be Serbs. He has his own idea, and there is no room in it for Serb poachers and intruders.

"Let the man who was not born a coward show tomorrow who and what he is. Let it be seen who sucked in the Serb spirit with his mother's milk.

"And if it were not for tomorrow's debt, which I have to settle, I would not be settling accounts here with my brothers—who are no brothers—to see which of us is a better Serb and whose eyes are steadier before the rifles and swords.

"I know that this is no dance with the girls. And I know, too, what you have to say against me on that score. I have danced with them, and I shall dance again: I am a man and I shall stay one. I never took a girl without her own consent. They say I am like a bull on the battlefield. Let me be! Better a bull for a year than a cow for a century. I can only be a Serb and a hero. Everything I am is plain

for all to see, and let it be seen! I am as I am. I enjoy myself and I fight; I live while I draw breath; I am a Serb of flesh and blood. And I am glad to be like that.

"There are no two roads for me; I shall trample everything that stands in the way of the Serb cause and glory. God created me to live and enjoy myself as a man, and to fight as a Serb; and I cannot do otherwise."

And these were the words of Mašan Janković:

"What is the Serb cause without Serbs, without our own land, without our own rulers and leaders? What has it been in the past, and what would it be in the future? It would be neither slavery nor a grave with no prayer read over it. Someone has to preserve the Idea. There can be no Serb Idea without living people.

"I, too, say it would be better for our name and our Idea to perish than for us to behave shamefully. Let the Austrian find how narrow the gates of Montenegro are. What he wins by the sword let him keep by it. But not everything human is for the sword to win and keep.

"There is nothing shameful in giving way for a time before force. What is shameful is to surrender one's soul, to give in to force; but an honorable withdrawal is not shameful.

"Cetinje could not betray the Serb cause, even if it wanted to, because then there would be no Cetinje. Whatever Cetinje does, it still thinks in the Serb way. The monarchy cannot betray Montenegro without renouncing its own crown. Each one of us can betray only himself.

"Harebrained and unclean though the Petrović dynasty may be, there is no one else today who could speak and act in the Serb name. It is in them now that the Serb race breathes and lives.

"Who knows whether Serbia will ever revive? But if we survive, the Serb race will survive. Let one inch of Serb

land stay free, and the Serbs will live again and go on living. But we can only go on living on honorable terms. Montenegro and shameful slavery cannot join hands.

"Serbia's ideas are not the only Serb ideas. Are we not Serbs, too? Did not our own ruler plunge into this war in the name of the Serbs and for Serbia's sake? Was not more than half of Serbia settled from here? To be a Serb is not any man's heritage to claim as he pleases. It is a life of toil among these rocks.

"If fighters are needed, are we not here?

"If we are united, why should it be under their leadership?

"If misfortune has kept us divided ever since Kosovo, let brothers come together as brothers, let there not be an elder or a younger.

"We will not refuse the Serb's way of martyrdom. But let us first consecrate this rocky ground with our blood in the hope of preserving it as a refuge for the Serbs? Once before the spark of Serb life fled here and revived. In this place the Serbs halted their ill fortune. Here they purged and hallowed themselves in their own blood.

"This is the altar and the eyrie of the Serbs. In this place the Serb sun never sets.

"But I am afraid that many have taken this path not for the sake of the Serb cause, nor for the sake of Serbia, but for the sake of those who do not care if this last refuge of the Serbs is destroyed.

"So long as there is a Montenegro, there will be a Serb people.

"I, too, am a living man. I have joys of my own. My home is dear to me, and the field below it and the mountain above it, and the speech of my people and my brothers.

"But let us see who is a Serb, a Montenegrin, whose name shall ride the sea of blood during tomorrow's trial.

"Come what may, I know what I shall do: I shall spare

neither them nor myself and grudge nothing I have to give. It will be better this way both for the Serb cause and for Cetinje, and their will has been mine, too.

"It is not easy to be a Serb; there is no end to Serb suffering and affliction. This is no dance with the girls, but a death grapple of men and nations. Let us put ourselves to the test in it and take the measure of ourselves as Serbs and as men.

"And we must put our trust in God, too. He will help the man who is brave and good."

9

And Petar Žurić said:

"The time has come when the Yugoslavs can no longer survive in separation. What are we, even if we come together in one piece, with one spirit, in the face of the powers that today carve up the world like a cake? We still have both feet in the Middle Ages; we are still strumming our ballads in the shadow of German airplanes and in the face of German guns. Well, if we were to take off and throw away everything that was not homemade, we would be stark naked and without a knife at our belts to cut our own throats with. It's not much better with Serbia either: they have bacon and grain, just as they had in Tsar Lazar's time. Otherwise they have no more than we have. And we must have what the rest have if we want to survive as a nation and not be somebody else's hired help.

"We have not yet hoisted ourselves out of peasant sandals and leggings, but we stay divided. The distance from the sea to the Danube is not as great as the folk song says. Not until we unite from the mountains of Slovenia to the Maritsa will our little state be able to resist trouble and poverty and greed.

"We know neither our own strength nor our weakness.

"I don't want to hear of a Serb Idea that does not mean freedom for the people. Why be a Serb if one cannot be a man? And why have a state if it is not to be the center post around which the whole Serb race turns?

"History is on the move. Earlier it flashed like lightning on Lovćen, now it is centering on Serbia. Serbia has been made captive, but its faith and its martyrdom have enlightened the world—that much we could and did give mankind. Serbia, in its true essence, has already risen from the grave.

"The Serb feeling of the Serbs is not more Serb than that of others; but Serbia, even trodden down, is still the center post around which everything turns. We have no other. We must go with Serbia, even against our will, if we want the Serbs and Yugoslavs to survive. If that is what we want! We must stand among the other nations so that our own people may be heard.

"Serbia's misfortune has been its inability to turn great dreams into action. It has had heroes and martyrs—and there are plenty of them today. But there are no rank-and-file workers for a great cause. Everything great is created by small people and in a small way; but once they have created it, they become great.

"Well, if we had luck and judgment, the Serbs would be shedding their blood here with us. Instead, they passed through Montenegro like a foreign army through a foreign country—we did not welcome them and they did not stop.

"What is not bought with blood does not hold.

"Now, we have battles before us, and not just one battle of Kolubara or one battle of Mojkovac, but hundreds of them. Our history is just beginning, and our thinking and our poetry. Those who survive will live to see what no one ever dreamed of—the Serb cause and the Yugoslav cause and human freedom all united.

"If only there were as much intelligence as there is heroism! As much unity as there is quarreling! As many liberators as rulers!

"What petty grievances we argue over! Should Nikola's sword take precedence over the beard of Serbia's Prime Minister? And at a time like this—when Serbia is gone and Montenegro is going. Indeed, one might believe that the Serbs were bewitched.

"Every man has something to regret before he dies; but a man would not be a man, he could not survive, if he were to sacrifice his ideals to mere existence. It is hard to be a Serb, but nice. A fine death is greater, less burdensome, than life.

"A desperate fight, a senseless fight, the last fight! But then, do men fight because it is wise to fight? Why do they fight, for what? Will they save or aid what they want—the Montenegrin state? No. Well then, it is for honor or glory. For ideals. The only realities at this moment. But does reason rule the world? Fighting is senseless. One might fight for one's life perhaps. And perhaps for ideals among mankind. Is man's mind given him to plan senseless conflicts? Have not all Serbian battles been battles of despair, forced upon us? All for the pure ideal.

"This is the most senseless, most idealistic battle of all.

"A strange destiny, to be an unlucky people with a great spirit. A people who reckon their defeats as victories. A people who celebrate their defeats. A people who sing songs of their defeats.

"That is the Serbian Idea. A song of misfortune. How long must it be so?

"We are the Serb people at this instant, on these blood-soaked mountain ridges. The thing we desire most, and the thing we can do, awaits us here. The thing we have to do."

And this is what Mališa Petrović said:

"I am a Serb, a Montenegrin. I am a Serb because I am a Montenegrin. I do not say that there are no other Serbs elsewhere—ill fortune has scattered us in every direction—but I am as I am. I am not a Montenegrin because I am a Serb, but a Serb because I am a Montenegrin. We Montenegrins are the salt of the Serbs. All the strength of the Serbs is not here, but their soul is. You may kill me, chop me in pieces, pound me and reduce me to powder, but what is Serb in me will remain so long as there is a particle of me left. And my Serb thoughts will last as long as my heart beats. There are other kinds of Serbs, but we are the Serbs from Kosovo who sing and celebrate the misfortunes of the Serbs. Wipe away Kosovo from the Serb mind and soul, and we are no more. There are no more Serbs.

"Kosovo, Kosovo! Destiny of the Serbs and their terrible place of judgment. If there had been no battle at Kosovo, the Serbs would have invented it, for its suffering and for its heroism. And now again our rulers and our leaders are gouging out each other's eyes and blackening each other's names. And for what? For power and grandeur—the curse of humanity. A great disaster for us all.

"We are waging a fight with God and the Devil. With the world and with ourselves. But to hack at ourselves and what is ours appeals to us most.

"Who are we, what are we? Our chiefs are shepherds and plowmen who had their first lick of pleasure and power only yesterday. We are ready to draw knives on each other today, and tomorrow Mojkovac will enfold us all in a common grave.

"Accursed country, rabble without justice! God forgot us and condemned us to struggle with ill fortune forever, and most of all with the evil in ourselves. What are we squabbling about? About wreckage, about power in states that are falling to bits and that the foreigner is treading underfoot. The Serbs are wrangling over death and about

who will first tear the heart out of whom; and tomorrow both—all of us down to the last man—will have perished or fallen into captivity.

"We have no other rule and government than that at Cetinje. They are Montenegro today, the primordial Montenegrin Serbs. Let us support them so long as God supports them. That we can do. And I want to. The Serb people of Montenegro are my people. I know that there are Serbs without Montenegro and that there can be no Montenegro without Serbs. But for me there can be no Serbs without Montenegro. When Montenegro perishes, I perish with it. I can do without my head but I cannot do without my soul. I am fighting for what I have.

"You are evil and accursed, Montenegro, above any country in the world; yet even as you are, you are dear to me. You have been steeped in the blackest evil and in the highest good, and they wage in you a fight that never ceases. Where will you find a man? Here. Where will you find a monster? Here. Where will you find a Serb? Here. Where will you find a renegade? Here. In you the human race is mirrored.

"Yet almighty God is merciful. He may well guide us to uphold the heroism of Kosovo. Let the song of Kosovo remain to witness: it cannot die.

"What have we to differ about? What is here is here. So is what we have to do.

"We are small, we are weak. Worse and stronger enemies have trampled on us, but we have never given them our soul, nor have we ever surrendered the Serb Idea.

"Small and weak. But everything is not numbers and force. Guns kill them, the Austrians, too. It is more grievous for them to die in prosperity than for us in adversity.

"We shall not spare them, for we spare not ourselves. God will help."

The argument was interrupted by the fall of twilight. But Stojan knew that the twilight was not the cause; rather, Colonel Medenica had returned, accompanied by Major Pavlović, a Serbian artillery commander, and had at once begun to discuss the next day's battle.

The use of maps and written orders had already been introduced into the Montenegrin Army. But on this occasion the proceedings were more like a consultation, not merely because they all knew each other, or because their battle stations were as familiar to them as their own farms—many of them were from this part of the country and felt that they were defending something close to them. There must be other reasons behind it. To Stojan this was obvious, because even Major Pavlović and Lieutenant Smiljanić, Serbs and strangers, also brought the same intimacy and familiarity into the discussion. Nor could he himself break free of it, although the dispute continued to drag on inside him.

There was something beyond his own will—beyond their will, too—that imposed this intimacy on the conference about the battle. Was it perhaps Christmas, which would be celebrated the next day in blood? Or the crucial nature of the battle? Or the presentiment of inescapable death for many of them—many who now sat drinking plum brandy, eating bits of cheese and smoked ham, and discussing when and from which direction they would strike the Austrians and who should come to the aid of whom.

The absorption, even gravity, with which they approached the problem, was most unusual. It was as if this grew as their familiarity with each other increased. At the end, Medenica defined both: "Strike as one man and as if the whole world depended on it."

It was close to suppertime when they broke up. As soon

as he was outside, Stojan stopped to consider: What now? Where do we go? The excitement of the quarrel, which he had felt until now, began to slacken the moment he emerged into the darkness and the snowy whiteness and had parted from his antagonists. Anger, distrust, swelling words, the clash with friends and with reality—all this lightly left him, as if the night, or the Tara, with its even sound, had washed it away.

It was still snowing heavily, and some mysterious, soft tapping of feet was heard on all sides. Stojan knew that it came from troops—their own units, which were concentrating from every direction. Who are you? Deserters? Reinforcements? In any case, they had not seen much blood so far! Yesterday they had broken through the snowdrifts of Sinjajevina and were now pouring out of the village toward the bridge.

Awakened by the darkness, the Tara murmured. What was it saying and to whom? In the thick whiteness there was no sound of a shot, no light, no human cry. The troops flowed by with a rustling sound and disappeared into the night—rivers, the Tara, many Taras, secret, inscrutable, angry. The Austrian troops were concentrating, too—tramping softly and rustling like a river. For them it was more disagreeable—a strange, rough country, snow. Snow and rugged country, they said, they had in Austria, too, but this was a foreign land. And war. War is a strange land, too. Men very quickly get used to it but they never become reconciled to it.

The snow could be seen falling heavily against the light of the inn windows; it might stop before long. Stojan could make out those who were leaving, and his thoughts dwelt briefly on them. Petar and Mališa—inseparable, yet so different. Time joins and parts all things. Petar, now—with all his schooling, all his intelligence, his imprisonments

and sufferings—he must still be lousy, dirty, and subordinate to Mališa. Yes, he has to fight. Mališa is crude and raw—something out of another age—but he has a firm and wholesome honesty. And Mašan, there goes Mašan. Stojan almost felt sorry for him as he saw him vanishing into the whiteness, a little bowed, buttoning up the collar of his greatcoat. They had come to hate each other, and tomorrow they might both be dead.

Stojan always felt a craving for women before a battle. Some men, when faced with death, feel an irresistible desire to assert life by copulating; in others the reverse occurs—a complete detachment from sensuality. With Stojan, at such times, the desire was open and unrestrained. He not only surrendered to the desire as soon as he felt it, but he knew beforehand when he was going to feel it. He felt it tonight, but in a different form—strong and persistent, not restless or unrestrained. The cause of his reflective mood on coming out of the inn was now clear—the craving for a woman was slowly coming to life and slowly transforming itself into a purpose.

The thought came to him: Perhaps tomorrow's battle will be different, too.

Immediately afterward he remembered that there was a young widow nearby, at Podbišće. The house was isolated, and there was nobody in it but the woman and a small child. There was also a hut there—a dairy, kitchen, or whatnot—if there should be anyone in the house. He had already been to her place. A good-looking woman, but, what mattered most, a blaze of fire, a whip. She had a name that was gentle and sweet—Dunja—but she herself was fierce and harsh. She had told him he could come whenever he liked, any evening; and he had promised that he might tonight.

Although he had never for an instant neglected his mili-

tary duties, he had always felt uncomfortable, as he did now, when he left the army to amuse himself with women. Yet he went off to them.

He calculated the time; to the widow's and then back to the battalion, to Mojkovac, would take close to an hour. It was now about eight. Even if he were to spend three hours with her, he could still return to the battalion in time; he might even manage to snatch one or two hours' sleep. But he had not made up his mind to go, and not so much because something urgent might arise in the field. He could secure himself against that; his groom was a kinsman who frequently helped him arrange such assignments, so he could tell him where he was going to be. He simply did not feel irresistibly drawn to Dunja tonight; it was as if tomorrow ruled out this night for such operations.

Just then Lieutenant Smiljanić came out. He recognized Stojan and came up to him. They had not known each other for long, but a similar attitude toward life, a thing that in wartime men are quick to discover, brought them close together. The Lieutenant, too, was a handsome man—tall, fair, with a tanned face and snowy-white teeth under thin, trimmed mustaches. He also held the view that one should not hoard one's good looks to no purpose but should employ them in giving pleasure to oneself and others. He loved women.

Without preliminaries, Smiljanić remarked to Stojan: "It looks to me as if there have been some serious differences among you Montenegrins. But why? The Austrians have us all by the throat." Stojan said nothing; the Lieutenant would not quite grasp what the dispute was about, and he was in no mood to analyze it for him. Even so he commented: "We Montenegrins are like that—nothing short of a common grave can unite us."

Although the earlier feeling of intimacy embraced the Serbian officers as well, it was obvious that they regarded

tomorrow's battle as being like any other. Was Smiljanić astonished at the quarrel among them? The quarrel had nothing to do with the battle, yet it had. For what were they to die tomorrow—for the intrigues of Cetinje or for something greater? But it was quite impossible to explain this to the Serbs, even though they were one nation, brothers. How would it be, thought Stojan, if I were to invite Smiljanić, a stranger here, for a drink and to have a good time. It was his Christmas Eve, too, and neither of them would have time to celebrate Christmas tomorrow.

Smiljanić declined the invitation, but hesitantly. He must first of all go back to the battery at Podbišće. As they were taking leave of each other, the thought struck Stojan: How would it be if I were to cede the widow to Smiljanić for tonight? Why not? He, too, is a soldier and a martyr, a brother Serb. Why not give him pleasure? Why not, after all, make him a present?

And Stojan offered Smiljanić the widow.

Smiljanić did not seem surprised, but thought it an awkward arrangement; she was no object to be passed from hand to hand, and she would probably not even consent. It turned out that Smiljanić knew where her house was and even knew her. Stojan grew obsessed by the idea: Of course she is not just an object, but she is a widow—she has a right to everything in her thirst for what is good and fine. She won't turn you down. I'm sure of that, only you will have to go to her secretly, so no one in the village notices. The main thing is that it should be done discreetly. If she doesn't recognize you, you have only to say who sent you and then start the conversation gently.

In the dark Stojan could not read the expression on Smiljanić's face, but from the tone of his voice and the attitude of his body, he was sure that the Lieutenant was smiling, with those strong white teeth of his, as much in gratitude as from a mild sensuality.

They took leave of each other, suddenly embracing; they had had no intention of doing so before they shook hands, but their strong handshake led on to an embrace. The Lieutenant went off on foot into the night, to the widow, and Stojan leaped onto his horse and started toward the battalion. But Smiljanić paused as he was almost out of earshot, and called: "Listen, I'll see that I repay you tomorrow. I'll give you solid support with the guns."

Stojan could not help smiling, as he dug his spurs into the horse. But his merriment quickly left him.

The jogging of the horse awoke in him unknown feelings and thoughts. It was as if he himself had changed. He had struggled like a wild beast for women, more violently than others for possessions or fame. Yet tonight he had abandoned a woman, a lovely woman, to another man. He remembered with tenderness his own wife, a town-bred girl, devoted and home-loving, who would not live in the village except in the summer. He remembered with a sweet satisfaction her pale plumpness, so temperate and moist and unresisting. He recalled the faces of their two boys; he felt himself quivering with joy. It is good to have a home of one's own; a man has always somewhere to come back to. But Dunja, she was different—she did not spare herself, she was a flame, she drank up a man's strength and never allowed him to grow weary of her. Smiljanić would have a warm night of it tonight with her.

Ranging from his wife to Dunja, from his home to his sons, Stojan caught himself in this, for him, unusual mood of contemplation. He very nearly talked aloud to himself, without noticing that he was driving soldiers off the snow track with his horse. Tomorrow I shall die, he thought. All this—the longing for home, giving up Dunja—must have come from this premonition! He had never meditated like this, nor had anything of this kind ever happened to him before. They say that a man has a premonition of his

death, and he himself had had occasion to observe this. Maybe he was having such a premonition now. He would die tomorrow. He. Or Mašan Janković. Mašan. "One of us will die tomorrow," he whispered aloud, and then, fully conscious and ashamed, he spurred his horse and began singing softly about the young warrior and the mountain that mourned for his death.

11

The Austrians knew Montenegro through and through, yet they could not avoid the mistake every conqueror makes. They knew that Christmas was the greatest of the Orthodox feasts and that Christmas Eve was also associated with the Purge—the extermination of the Christian renegades under Prince-Bishop Danilo at the end of the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries. Through Njegoš's poem "Mountain Wreath," inspired by this theme, the Purge became for Montenegrins more than a legend, more than the resurrection of their independence: it became their spiritual and emotional world. Knowing this, knowing, indeed, too much, the Austrians believed that by starting their offensive precisely on Christmas Eve and by developing the battle during the days of the Christmas feast they would strike the Montenegrins, from the King down to the last soldier, in the most sensitive spot, that they would strike at their constitutional and national life, at their spiritual and moral life.

The calculation was not inaccurate: they did in fact strike such a blow. But its consequences were the opposite: the roar of the artillery and the yelping of the machine guns on Christmas Eve and over Christmas revealed an enemy to whom nothing was sacred, who wished not merely to subdue the country and wreck the state, but also to root

out that which made Montenegrins what they were—the mind and spirit without which there is no life. The Montenegrins were astonished, even though they did not expect the Austrians to respect the Orthodox Christmas or the Montenegrin Christmas Eve. But because the attack had been so deliberately aimed both at their popular holiday celebrations and at the quintessence of their history, the resistance to it took on a decisive, fateful significance.

And, as often happens at such moments, someone found words that expressed their defiant indignation and that spread and transformed themselves into something more than a challenge and a curse, into a purpose in the minds of the men who fought. These words were: "The Bloody Christmas." They signified not only slaughter and misery, but also: "If that's how it is, we will have a bloody Christmas, and may the Fritzes long remember how we keep it." With these words and with this thought, the battalions moved on Christmas morning.

The snow made the going slow and stifled every sound; the army moved in a muffled silence, a silence so complete that the words of the young priest Jagoš, who in the white gloom was exhorting the Kolašin battalion at Mojkovac, echoed from it as from a wall. Fiery and consoling as his words were, they sounded empty and barren, and if the soldiers had not been in much the same empty and barren mood, someone would have asked the priest facetiously to cut it short because they knew how to die without any words of encouragement. The priest felt this himself, and just as he was about to end his address, out of the dead whiteness pigheaded old Father Aleksa appeared on his horse. "Less talk and more work. The shorter the sermon, the sweeter the air. Take a cross in one hand and a gun in the other and get out in front of the men!"

The troops respected Father Jagoš for his earnest and conscientious efforts, but they loved Father Aleksa for his

oddity and his amusing proverbs, and especially because, unlike the younger priests, he did not observe the canonical rules but winked at the soldiers' misdemeanors and himself took the field and fought with a weapon, rivaling the youngest and most ardent. However, this time his words got no response from the men.

Even the commanding officers did not venture, or did not remember, to deliver the addresses customary before battle. Nor was there a word heard from the wags, who can be found in every unit in every army in the world.

In addition to the usual anxiety before a new battle—and every battle is new—the army was seized by the same feeling a man possesses when he has made up his mind to face every risk in order to rescue or attain something of vital importance to him. The soldiers thought clearly, however, and their remarks were cool and to the point: a casual shot up on the ridges would halt and alert whole battalions in various sectors. Each man brooded over the situation in his own fashion, and in doing so felt a terrible isolation, as if he were destined to carry the load all by himself. But in addition to this personal feeling, which is typical before one goes into action, there was another feeling—a suppressed seriousness and a fearful resolution to face all odds. That was why there was no enthusiasm, though there was no fear or hesitation, either.

One thing was absolutely certain. If someone, on this night, had asked any soldier beneath the Mojkovac ridges, "Will Montenegro lose the war?," he would have been answered without hesitation in the affirmative, even if the soldier knew nothing about the Austrian offensives on the other fronts. But if he had asked him, "Should one, in spite of this, fight to the death with the Austrians tomorrow?," the other man would have hesitated only long enough to be surprised at such a question. No one regarded the battle as senseless or useless, even if it failed to alter by a

hair's breadth the inevitable doom of the Montenegrin state or of the Serbian cause. But if any of these soldiers had been forced to explain the meaning and object of the battle which, it was clear, they wanted and were bound to fight, they would have been confused or would have started, like Father Jagoš, with big words about the Serb cause, centuries of Montenegrin heroism and honor, the old King, home, and God's mercy on brave men. But these words would have sounded empty and false and would not have explained anything or convinced anyone of anything.

This mood was not confined to the Mojkovac area alone. The same was true on the other fronts, too.

But in the high command on the most important of all the fronts—the Lovćen front—bewilderment and a lack of fighting spirit prevailed. The King's son Prince Petar, an untalented and rash leader, was up to his ears in intrigues for a separate peace and inclined to accept this as the way out. The units under his command were senselessly shifted about and then withdrawn, so that the enemy at once and with ease occupied Kuk, the key position on Lovćen, and opened up the road to Cetinje.

This front was indeed the most inactive of all. But it is also true that there was no room for any great degree of activity. The Montenegrins had no fleet, so they could not fight the Austrians at sea or even along the coast. They had to remain on the rocky heights.

There was no proof of any serious treason. But the authorities at Cetinje who, through Prince Petar, were most immediately concerned with maintaining this front were indeed lacking in conviction and will power, divorced from the warlike spirit of the army, and even in conflict with it. Their cowardice and confusion, which generally go together, constituted their real and major treason.

Lovćen and Cetinje, those historic symbols of resistance,

fell almost without a battle, and the rest of the country soon followed. Under the blows dealt, in particular, by the fleet and also by the air force, not to mention the huge preponderance of Austrian manpower, the key positions on this front would have fallen sooner or later; but they fell as if they had been defended by a useless army. There is no doubt, however, that, had there been anyone to give it leadership, this army would have fought a most savage fight. These particular Montenegrins were the most warlike, the stubbornest of all. Their ancestors had created the Montenegrin state, established the Montenegrin name; and their failure to fight a resolute battle remained a source of ineffaceable shame and bitterness to them.

The Hercegovinian front, the second front between Lovćen and Mojkovac, was commanded by a kinsman of the King, Vojvoda Djuro Petrović, elderly and not very clever, but a most honorable man. His front was more active, but, unlike Serdar Janko's front facing Bosnia, he encountered fortified and prepared positions, crammed with artillery and machine guns, all of which constituted an insuperable obstacle to the Montenegrin Army. There was no general engagement at this front; owing to geographical and climatic conditions, it was not fixed and tied to a single point, as it was at Mojkovac, but frittered and frayed itself away in little separate, though fierce, engagements. This front put up a sturdy resistance until the enemy, penetrating through Cetinje, came in on its flank and in its rear. When the capitulation was ordered, Vojvoda Djuro broke his sword, in order not to give it up to the enemy.

Serdar Janić's army, the so-called Sandžak Army, had an undoubted advantage because of the experience gained through innumerable earlier skirmishes in a similar setting of hills and forests. The men who fought at Mojkovac boasted later on—without justification—that they had been the only ones with the skill and ability to wage such a

battle. It is, however, correct to say that they fought the battle of the whole of Montenegro—the battle that Lovćen would not fight and that Hercegovina was in no position to fight.

In this mood of cold and gloomy resolution, they were capable of the highest, insensate heroism. A people which long and patiently endures violence and slavery but does not give in to them never becomes a slave in spirit. There remains in it always something inflexible, refractory, indestructible. This asserts itself most fully in battles, especially in those that do not lead to victory.

There are times when individuals, and, even more frequently, groups of men are willing to go to their death to show themselves mightier than their adversaries and to create for coming generations the incentive and the conditions needed for survival. Something of this kind was involved in the battle of Mojkovac.

At Mojkovac there were no wild heroes to intoxicate the crowd, but there were no cowards, waverers, or runaways either.

But who knew, who could have known, the whole tale? Who, indeed, gave it a thought? Wars and battles are realities like any other, and a man's foremost aim is to find his bearings in them.

The senior officers did not think of the meaning this silence and the slow, measured tread of the soldiers might have. They were in much the same mood themselves; behind the men who were clearing a way through the snow, they walked slowly and firmly in front of their units.

Unknowing, a nation had decided to die—in order to live.

Some time before dawn the snow stopped, and the hills above Mojkovac emerged in fire. Both armies had kept fires going all night, and now they radiantly revealed themselves to each other. In war, there are moments when the antagonists, occupied simultaneously with the same vital needs—food, sleep, or whatever it may be—do not disturb each other. And now the opponents were peacefully warming themselves around their respective fires, making ready for the morning. From Mojkovac there was a particularly fine view of the flaming row of Montenegrin fires.

A sober quiet reigned in the whiteness that united heaven and earth. At the crack of dawn, which broke from the earth, from the sky, the white silence was shattered by the batteries on the Montenegrin side.

The Austrians were fully prepared for the Montenegrin attack. During the previous afternoon and night they had managed to strengthen their positions by digging themselves in at the most important points and fencing themselves with wire, making skillful use of shrubs and tree trunks, holly and elm. Judging by their experience in the previous fighting, they thought that the Montenegrins would make brief and violent attacks with the support of five or six antiquated guns and then withdraw to the next hill. They were now surprised at their persistence and toughness, and no less at the numbers and accuracy of the Montenegrin artillery.

The Montenegrins had assembled from different sources, including the Serbians, about forty guns, and by superhuman efforts had also hauled up two howitzers. Even after the Austrian reinforcements had arrived, the Montenegrins remained slightly superior in artillery on Mojkovac. Although short of ammunition, they did not spare it, con-

scious as they were of the decisive nature of the battle and of the position.

It is the custom in Montenegro to welcome Christmas with gunfire, and the roar of the guns certainly called up memories of this among the Montenegrins. And throughout the Austrian Army the joke was repeated about the Montenegrin officer who, on being ordered by his superior to open fire with his whole artillery, inquired: "Do you mean with both guns, sir?" But on this morning it was neither tradition nor jest.

The key points became at once a whirl of flame, snow, earth, stones, and trees, of steel and human flesh. Under practiced direction, all the guns at the decisive moment directed their fire on Razvršje—a piece of open ground lying well forward and about twelve hundred yards long by six hundred wide. It was one continuous eruption of fire and earth, replying to the invisible thunders from Večerinovac and Little Prepran. From Mojkovac it could easily be seen how quickly this modest clearing was plowed up, while in black caterpillar files, the Montenegrins crept up toward it from three sides through the stripped forest. As soon as the booming of the guns and the sullen eruption at Razvršje broke off, the angry barking of the machine guns and the dull, irregular reports of rifles, the din of troops in action and even the yells of individual fighters could easily be heard from Mojkovac.

And so it went on.

For how long? No one kept track of the time. To the warriors at Mojkovac it seemed long and slow.

After having been beaten back, the Montenegrins could be seen regrouping in confusion at Razvršje. There was the short, splintering report of hand grenades, the yapping of machine guns, sporadic rifle shots, the shouts and the long-drawn-out, agonizing cries of the soldiers. Then silence—long because it was painful. Then once again among

the thick beech scrub there were little groups of Montenegrins who had been thrown back or had reappeared from somewhere. They, too, vanished in the tumult of fire and of furious snarling and rending. There was a long, now sweet silence—perhaps the Montenegrins were successful. But it all began again. The orderlies in front of the command post at the Mojkovac watchtower tramped around, pale and frightened. It went on and on, and nobody came to report.

It was ten o'clock by the time the battle began to quiet down, only echoing with dull rifle shots beyond the hills.

Batches of old men and young, some of them without arms, passed in front of the tower, hurriedly but quite calm and talking as if they were not on their way to a battlefield. Nobody was either leading them or halting them—they were an uninvited reinforcement from the Montenegrin hills. The first lightly wounded men arrived from up above, messengers from the battlefield, but with so little they could tell. There was a stir among the women, too, from the front and toward it. Those who had been near the battlefield had seen only the dead and the wounded.

Colonel Medenica had sent out two runners at about seven o'clock, but they had not yet returned. He sat in the tower on a stone by the fire, huddled in his greatcoat, as though he had just waked up and, feeling cold, wanted to warm himself. The walls of the tower were dilapidated, a ragged surface of stone and lime mixed with sand. The floors, the doors, the window frames, everything except the black beams, had been carried off, and the tower, of two lofty stories, with a gaping roof of stone slabs, was like a cave, desolate and deformed. Human hands had built it, but human hands had also wrecked and looted it.

Although his father, Dragiša Perkov, and the equally old but stouter Serdar Miro Vlahović were sitting there,

Miloš Medenica sat silent, in tense patience, as if he were alone. What did they want, these two old men? To give advice? Nobody listened to them; war is waged differently these days. To go to the front? But they can scarcely keep on a horse. If nothing else, the army would be pleased to see them.

When the tumult had died down, Dragiša crossed himself. "Great, almighty God, think of the poor; help the Montenegrin Army." Miro did the same. Roused by the silence, Miloš got up and went outside to see if the runners had arrived.

A whole line of men could be seen coming down from Uloševina, one behind the other, dragging stretchers. There were similar files elsewhere, emerging in the clearings below the bluff. To reduce the number of stretcher-bearers and speed up the transport of wounded, someone had thought of putting the wounded men on stretchers consisting of two poles with a wattle hurdle between them, which the bearer grasped by the forward end and trailed along the snow track. The snow spattered and covered the wounded, but their evacuation went quicker and did not require many bearers. On the level ground, bearers and horses were waiting for the wounded and carried them away.

Gradually the course of the battle became clear.

The Montenegrins could easily have wiped out the Austrians, who were fewer in number, had they not unexpectedly come on barbed-wire entanglements. On striking this obstacle, Stojan Stanković's battalion had been thrown into disorder, but it had not broken up, even though it had been caught in cross fire from Uloševina, which was still untaken. The soldiers had withdrawn, seeking any form of cover—trees, rocks, hollows. Then they moved forward again. And so it went several times over. The troops were unusually persistent. But the wire and the cross fire pre-

vented their taking Razvršje. Even with Uloševina in Montenegrin hands again, Stojan's battalion alone was not strong enough to penetrate around the flanks and into the rear of the enemy. In addition, the Austrians were clearly determined that Razvršje, which they had taken the previous morning, was not to be given up without considerable trouble. Its naked and exposed situation made it the key to the whole position.

Mašan Janković's battalion moved up out of reserve, right below Razvršje, to reinforce Stojan from the right. No one had given him an order to do so, and nobody could, since there was no telephone communication with Mojkovac. But it had been agreed the previous night that Mašan, following the development of the battle, would hurry up in support. And he moved at the decisive moment.

He, too, however, struck wire, but because it was in a well-wooded area and wisps of mist were floating around, it was possible, with the aid of covering fire, to get right up to it. Through a number of gaps opened up by clippers and dynamite, the battalion overran the Austrians like an avalanche and found itself in their rear. The Austrians began to waver, and once again Stojan's battalion sprang out of the mist, around the wire and through it, and took Razvršje. Both battalions rushed at the enemy's heels as far as Lepenac, where they met the resistance of the main body of the Austrians from the slopes and hillocks of Cer.

The cutting of the wire was done mostly by the older men. It was a duty that they had taken upon themselves ever since the action at Scutari. In the skirmishes there in 1912 and 1913, the youth of Montenegro had been thrown into the battle and mown down to no purpose. The main obstacle there was wire and it was covered by machine guns. Fruitless attacks went on for weeks. Then the Montenegrin elders decided to relieve the young men in the ranks

of death in order to secure some posterity for the country and the clans. They attacked the wire with dynamite, blew it up, and often, since they were inexperienced, themselves as well.

With the repulse of the enemy into the Lepenac Valley, the battle of the first day of Christmas virtually ended. The Montenegrins had retaken what they had lost on Christmas Eve. It had been a great victory but not a decisive one or overcostly in lives. The men were cheerful again; they sang songs on the battlefield, songs based perhaps on this very battle.

It was evident, however, both from the enemy's pertinacity in the morning and from his activity in the afternoon, that he did not regard the battle as concluded. This was confirmed by a patrol, which early in the evening got through to Mojkovac, having been sent out to the enemy's rear two days ago. The main body of the Austrian Army was now around Lepenac. Its strength was already known. Now its line of attack was also known—Razvršje, Mojkovac. The patrol was led by a local hunter, a tall, well-built, fair-haired man. He related that as they were making their way through the forests and snowdrifts, they had come on the tracks of an Austrian patrol which had been sent out to reconnoiter. There were fifteen Austrians, obviously picked men, boys of a good stamp, tall, ruddy, and fair-haired. The Montenegrins crept up to them and killed them to the last man. The hunter told all this as good-naturedly and simply as if he had returned from hunting hares.

Word had come through to Medenica that Captain Mašan Janković had been killed, fighting at the head of his battalion, and that Stojan Stanković had been wounded in the arm. About noon, bodies began to be brought down to Mojkovac, but Mašan's troops did not allow their commander's body to be removed. Stojan took their part and

gave orders for a grave to be dug in the clearing below the hill at Uloševina, within sight of the two borders. They lowered the body, bareheaded, in a greatcoat riddled with bullet holes on the chest and stained with blood, and with his sword laid alongside.

Stojan was a noted speaker and liked to make speeches. He stood over the grave, huge and black in the snow, with heaps of earth around it. In his grave Mašan looked even smaller and somehow sadly shrunken. With his left hand in a sling, Stojan stood gazing now at Mašan's pale, frozen eyes and open mouth, now at the valley of the Tara and the mountaintops. A vast, limitless space spread above the grave and the battlefield. The soldiers were silent, and the priest, too, waiting for the speech. A soldier from Mašan's battalion broke down and began to sob, and an unknown woman began to keen. Perhaps to Stojan that meant more than any words, and he rubbed his nose and eyes with the back of his hand. Then he took a handful of earth and scattered it, taking care that it did not fall on Mašan's face. What was there to say? He had been a Serb and a man: "May the earth you soaked with your own and the enemy's blood rest lightly on you."

Stojan walked off with long strides toward his battalion at Razvršje, as if he were running from the grave, from the woman whose wailing hovered over the mountaintops, over the armies, dark and long-drawn-out, calling upon the living and the dead, cursing the accursed land of Montenegro, where a good and brave young man could not survive, cursing, pounding into stone the invader who had drowned even Christ's day in human blood and had come, unasked, to pluck the flower of Montenegro.

Before dawn on the following morning, the second day of Christmas, January 8, the Montenegrins deployed two battalions in strength in the direction of Lepenac. They came down the slope cautiously—patrols had sent word that the enemy was ahead of them—and slowly because of the snow.

But before they got to Lepenac they ran into what seemed a wall of fire—thick, broad enemy columns. Beaten back, they withdrew hurriedly and in disorder, and as they reached Uloševina and Mjedeno Guvno, the Austrian artillery began to fire on Razvršje, which lies between these two positions. The fire quickly spread to these two positions as well. Shortly afterward the Austrians delivered attacks on all three positions—in their usual neat and orderly columns. Mjedeno Guvno alone was held, defended by a battalion composed of men from Poretar, in the neighborhood of Mojkovac. But the reason for their success was not that these men fought harder than the rest in defense of their home ground. In this war, and particularly in this battle, attachment to one's own home and village was practically nonexistent. It was known that the Austrians made no local distinctions, in contrast with the Moslems and Albanians in earlier wars, with whom the Montenegrin clans, on their side, had had their own accounts to settle. The predominant feeling now was for the state and for the Serb nation as a whole, and this was relevant to the actual conditions: Austria's aim was the annihilation of the independent Serbian states and the submission of the entire Serb population.

The forces that attacked Mjedeno Guvno were weaker or less resolute, and their failure to take this position made it decidedly easier for the Montenegrins to counterattack.

Mjedeno Guvno served as a rallying point for the Montenegrin troops, who withdrew mostly in this direction rather than toward Mojkovac, thus remaining on the Austrians' left flank. The Montenegrins now had to fight for the same positions they had wrested from the enemy the day before.

The Austrian attack was not as powerful and unerring as usual, but rapid and violent. It looked as though the Austrians were mortified by their reverse on the previous day. General Rainel, the commander of the Sixty-second Division, personally supervised the attacking troops.

The Montenegrins quickly re-formed. It was of the utmost importance to them to attack the positions before the Austrians reinforced them. Their units were tired but had sustained no major losses. Their reserves had come up—the Uskok battalion and a battalion of recruits—but so far these had not entered the battle.

Mališa and Petar, at the head of their battalion, tackled Razvršje from the Mojkovac side. There were tracks and trails through the snow on all sides, made by the columns and by individuals the day before. In spite of this, the snow prevented the troops from functioning as a rifle formation or as anything but groups or miniature columns. The cold, clear weather also made their operations more difficult. One entire company had been detailed to remove the wounded, since to be left wounded for even a few minutes meant freezing to death. There had been cases of this on the two previous days, and the soldiers were more afraid of it than of wounds or of death in battle.

The artillery command, presumably on orders from Mojkovac, and seeing the battalion deployed for the attack, began to sprinkle Razvršje with shellfire.

In the frozen whiteness, everything—twigs, the moss on tree trunks, the tracks of squirrels—stood out sharply, and the least movement struck the eye. Fighting conditions had

been more favorable the day before: it had been possible to take advantage of the drifting mist and the enemy had been weaker.

Petar's view was that the advance should be gradual until the last moment, and that use should be made of every tree trunk, every fold in the ground. Ground should be taken step by step and held on to. Mališa grasped Petar's plan and at once accepted it. But he thought it unnecessary to prescribe the method of advance to company and platoon commanders. They would act in line with their battalion commanders and with the given circumstances.

He motioned with his hand, invoking the help of God, and although only those units that were nearest to him could see his gesture, the companies, deployed into platoons and sections, moved to the attack.

The artillery broke off their fire.

The troops advanced slowly and with caution, driving back the Austrian outposts. Machine guns began firing furiously. In the forest it sounded as if they were shooting from every direction—from the rear, from the sky. On the edge of the clearing the units that met this fire split up into little groups, or into individuals, ducking around the roots of trees and into hollows. The Austrians were clearly visible at a distance of some three hundred yards in the trenches dug the night before; heads poked up, bayonets glittered icily.

As soon as Petar emerged from the trees, an enemy machine gun, which seemed to have been waiting for this very moment, started to clip the twigs of a shrub, whirling snow and fragments of tree and bark around. The Montenegrins fired at the enemy forces from behind the trees. This was not a good thing; instead of a hand-to-hand combat, it might come to a mere shooting match. The clearing seemed an insuperable obstacle. The battalions on the flanks should

begin to operate, but perhaps they were waiting for Petar's battalion. Perhaps, in spite of the clearing, the fight would have to start here.

Petar knew, he felt, that he had turned pale; but since Mališa, who stood beside him, was pale, too, he felt no shame. He knew that he would have to fight his way across the clearing, and that he would have to take the lead. It was still the custom in the Montenegrin Army for battalion officers to advance at the head of their units, even though their control of them suffered as a result.

He waited for the right moment to attack. In spite of the continuous firing, he thought and calculated calmly, deliberately, noting at the same time that the tree, the clearing, and even the huge open space beyond him had dissolved and ceased to exist, and that he himself, with his whole being—which had grown and developed to such an extent that he felt nothing but his own presence—was heading toward this inevitable moment.

Petar knew all this from experience, and yet what he was going through now was new. Equally familiar to him, and yet new, was the loss of all realization of what would follow—the clash with the enemy and the one real, crucial, and ever more fateful instant of leaving cover and fighting. Everything else lost meaning and content; but this instant had to be awaited with concentration and picked out of the slow, endless procession of time. This instant had to be carried out, yes, carried out; and depending on what he, Petar, did then, that instant would be different from all the rest, or else lost among them. The whole army, and every soldier individually, was waiting for that instant. Both armies. They were waiting for the two of them—Petar and Mališa—for him, Petar.

The time passed slowly, so terribly slowly. How long had it been? A minute? He looked at his watch—he had

looked at it when they dived under cover. It had stopped. No, the second hand was moving. Not so much as a minute had passed.

The troops had fallen silent; only the enemy were firing. What was Mališa doing? Waiting for the right moment? Petar looked at Mališa, who was huddled up as if he wanted to sink into the snow, into the ground. Then Mališa jumped out from behind the tree with sword drawn and dashed forward frantically, with no thought for any other moment but this. "Ha, who's for glory, hurrah!"

As though this was what they had been waiting for, the troops yelled and spurred forward, and the forest and the hills seemed to move with them.

This roused Petar, too, and he found himself in the clearing, overtaking Mališa.

It was action, so familiar yet forever different, like love, like death. It was terrible to reflect on or to describe, but an intoxicating joy while it was going on, with no feeling of danger, but with a strange, distant idea that one might be killed by a steel bullet or bayonet. At all events, visible, palpable danger was for others, not for the individual who was fighting.

All this Petar knew well. As he ran through the snow with his revolver in his right hand and his sword in his left hand, he saw soldiers falling as they were hit, flinging their arms wide or doubling up in the snow. But it was as if they were not dead or wounded and not his soldiers, and cries and blood, gaping jaws and starting eyes seemed quite natural to him, as if he personally had nothing to do with them. Yes, that was what it was like in battle, something at the bottom of his memory told him: a man becomes drunk, not even the most painful wounds hurt, he finds himself different from his usual self, not himself at all, possessed with the urge to survive, certain that he will survive.

At the same time he saw everything clearly and reacted

with full self-possession. The snow was obviously exhausting Mališa; he was red in the face. The butt of a fallen soldier's rifle stuck out of the snow, and the snow was mixed with earth and blood, yesterday's, black blood. If he managed to run halfway across the clearing, he would not be killed, because the Austrians would have to jump out of cover and the bayonet fighting would begin. That would be a different matter. The clearing would cease to be, as it were, their exclusive privilege.

He glanced left and right and was glad to find that they were halfway across the open ground. It was as if he had leaped into some new and brightly lit space. Less than ninety yards separated them from the enemy trenches. The Austrian soldiers, visible down to the waist, were holding their rifles, with bayonets fixed, at the ready, and a fair-haired, clean-shaven soldier with a red face appeared to be aiming straight at Petar.

Petar thought: Why don't they jump out of the trench? This one might get me.

Just then a ragged double line of enemy soldiers, yelling and bristling with bayonets, started up from the ground, from the snow, as if they were making for Petar, and with inconceivable speed appeared in front of him. The same clean-shaven, red-faced soldier who had taken aim at him came straight at him with his bayonet, as if by magic. Petar fired—not exactly at a live, clean-shaven human being, but at an object, at something that did not really exist. Then he dodged before the bayonet, and the bayonet shot on with a cry and dragged the astonished clean-shaven man into the snow.

The Austrian ranks dashed themselves against a group of Montenegrins, until their line no longer held together. Petar looked about him at the seething mass of shouting men, at the sparring, the gasping, the grappling; he noticed that he was shouting, too. Mališa was yelling words

of encouragement to the troops—if anyone could hear him—frantically waving his sword in one hand and his revolver in the other.

The Austrians were running back in disorder. But Petar was sure—he could not say why—that this meant neither the end of the action nor victory. It seemed as if the troops felt the same. The Montenegrins were not as usual skirmishing furiously at the heels of the fugitives, but cautiously, as if they were expecting a fresh counterattack.

And indeed from beyond the bend there suddenly rose up a living wall of Austrians. It was thick, compact, and orderly, with serried bayonets like the teeth of a comb. And this wall moved. It rolled forward as if blind or numb, paying no heed to rifle fire; those who fell were immediately replaced by others. Even so, the Montenegrins awaited it, and some groups even made a dash at it.

The wall of Austrians wound this way and that, cracked, and the two armies joined battle.

Petar was almost surprised when two or three teeth fell out of the comb in front of them and a gap opened. He was afraid that he might find himself in the Austrian rear, cut off from his own men. But all around him was a whirling mass of men striking, stabbing, panting. On every side blood spurted out with cries and cries with blood; the living took each other's lives among the wounded and the dead. He, too, shouted aloud, from some irresistible tension, from the need to shout rather than to communicate something. Not only would no one have heard his word of command, but they would not have understood it. He fought like all the rest. Now he had a gun in his hands; he broke the butt against somebody's head. Another head he clove to the eyes with his sword.

The noise of revolver shots pierced the din and the shouting, and a bluish smoke quickly covered the battlefield. This was a Montenegrin expedient in battle. They

mostly used a special type of revolver called "Montenegrin," which fired a smoky powder with thick leaden bullets, and they preferred it to the bayonet. In hand-to-hand fighting the revolver was the more effective, but a unit that kept its ranks well closed would usually beat back the Montenegrins by bayonet fighting.

The desperate engagement with the second wave of Austrians was still going on when a third sprang up, even denser and more relentless. It was as if somebody were sitting on the other side of the hill waiting calmly for the right moment to pull a string or press a button and release serried lines of Austrians who kept their ranks unbroken and unwavering in spite of their having come up at the double. Their protracted battle cry in unison helped them in this.

The mere appearance of such a united and powerful adversary at a moment when the Montenegrins were still struggling with those before them suddenly made all opposition seem senseless. That is what Petar felt.

The oddest thing was that all the troops, Montenegrin and Austrian, saw and felt this new irresistible wave before ever it surged onto the battlefield, and began to adjust themselves to new and unforeseen circumstances—the first to withdrawal and flight, the second to an advance.

It was useless to call upon the soldiers to keep fighting. Petar nevertheless did so, although he was conscious that they would not and could not obey him. He even tried to restrain some of them by force, but found himself finally in a crowd on a hillside in the forest, as if a torrent had swept him away.

To their left the action had also died down. Clearly, the fight for Uloševina had not been successful. But Mjedeno Guvno had held; there the fire was subsiding on the enemy's side of the ridge.

The strange thing was that Mališa, too, was there, still

alive, as were large numbers of soldiers scattered in the forest. Casualties seemed not to have been heavy. Mališa was mopping sweat, puffing and cursing: "By God, they've properly winded me." The soldiers speedily and without summons gathered in their sections, passed each other bread and tobacco, and dressed their wounds, as if nothing had happened.

Here, too, it was as if someone were calmly following the course of the battle.

The recruit battalions advanced up the hollows, deploying for a new attack, and behind them followed Stojan Stanković's battalion, which had rallied after the withdrawal that morning from Razvršje. The three recruit battalions were not up to their full strength, yet they were stronger and more powerful than the regular battalions. This was Serdar Janko Vukotić's idea: to form modern battalions out of recruits—with Montenegrin fighting spirit. He had created in his army three battalions that were exceptional for their courage, their powers of endurance, and their discipline; but they almost melted away in the incessant fighting of the summer and autumn. Made up of young men from the whole of Montenegro (the rest of the army was put together by clans and districts), these battalions were at full strength at the beginning of the war—about eight hundred men. It was on them that the heaviest tasks fell. By now they had barely four hundred men, in spite of continual drafts from the reserves.

For a long time now these young men had been teasing each other and making jokes at the expense of the clans and brotherhoods. They had also been mocking death. Action, wounds, and endless casualties had welded them into a single family. But in spite of their cheerfulness, there was something sad about them, as if they were all condemned to die. They knew that they were capable of the hardest tasks, of impossibilities, but they also knew that

their ranks were inevitably diminishing. Disciplined, never boastful—except when it was necessary to defend the good name of their own and the other recruit battalions—they went into an attack without much fuss or haste, but briskly and as one man. In withdrawal they were the same. Their equipment was superior and their uniforms complete. The rest of the army, the officers excepted, were not dressed in complete uniforms; they wore caps of the Montenegrin pattern and jackets and overcoats mostly of Russian army cloth, but in the remainder of their clothing—shoes, trousers, scarves, and gloves—there was a good deal of the peasant.

Petar watched these silent young men advancing quietly through the forest to accomplish what his own battalion had been unable to do. Suddenly he felt sure that they would succeed. But how many of them would be killed? How big would their battalions be afterward? They would be reduced to companies, keeping only their names. And his own soldiers? Just now they were gathering in the gullies and calling out to each other—asking and telling who in their clan had been wounded or killed.

His thoughts skipped over to the enemy.

What, in fact, did Austria want? It was well known; he knew it himself. Austria wanted to conquer the Serb lands and to impose on them a form of government most suitable to Austria, and thereby to stifle the idea of Yugoslav unity, which was chipping at the antiquated multi-racial monarchy and undermining it. Yes, that was Austria's aim and the policy of her court and of her leading officers and financiers.

But what was the aim of her people—civilized, cultured, wealthy, long rid of illiteracy and disease? What did those soldiers want, out there on the hill, all those doctors, professors, workmen, and peasants who were so only in name and did all their work by machines and lived in cleanliness

and comfort? What were they looking for in these desolate snow-clad hills? What did they want from these peasants who were still cattlemen, still bound together by legends into blood communities, mostly illiterate, coming from huts and hovels they share with the cattle and in which no one has ever heard of a bed, or a metal spoon, or, often, of a shirt? What were they looking for in a country where a man is accounted rich if his folk have milk, corn, and rugs to cover themselves? What did they want of a people which has just emerged from centuries of slavery into statehood and a way of life of its own?

Surely the Austrians—both these who are here and those in Vienna—are wondering what we can be fighting for when we have nothing and why we put up such resistance to their attempts to civilize us, to their building roads and railway tracks and opening mines and factories. And they would indeed accomplish this civilizing mission—in their own interest, of course—and perhaps more quickly and cheaply than we could in our independent states. No doubt they attribute our bitter resistance to our backwardness; and we have more than our share of that, with the ambition of our rulers and the selfishness of our nationalistic parties. They consider their own struggle just. We have killed their Crown Prince; we are undermining their European, civilized state, in which a variety of nations have long found a place of their own; with our crude, intractable nationalism we have blocked their road to the East; our forests rot and our minerals lie idle, while we ourselves are incapable of exploiting them.

Yes, it's all a huge misunderstanding.

And the enemy's motives became comprehensible to Petar, and even incontrovertible.

But the more fully he understood the mind of the enemy who had just now butchered these ragged, hungry wretches, with their heads muffled up in colorful scarves, who were

now clustering around their leaders with greater alacrity than usual, as if ashamed at some sin they had committed, the more Petar felt a cold hatred, a hatred almost palpable and such as he had never felt before, not only against the enemy soldiers there on the hillside, with whom he must fight, and against those who had sent them, but against everything that was theirs—their country, their language, their culture, which had instilled into them this exact, indisputable logic and had inspired them to come and fight in these mountain gorges, far from their universities, their spotless towns and villages, their glittering machines and smooth roads, their soft beds and their equally soft wives, against Montenegrin goatherds and cowherds who longed for all the goodness and ease of life.

The sun was already well up in a sky as pale blue and as unruffled as if it had been made of clear glass. As never before, the sun seemed to Petar alive, almost human, engaged in an incomprehensible, enchanting, magical dance with the snowy peaks of the mountains. Well, if he had been killed, he would not have seen this young, playful sun and its love-making with the mountaintops; those who fell would never see it. And after this new perception of the sun and the mountains—almost identification with them—his thoughts returned to the Austrians. They want to kill; they would kill this sun and its play. Why, why had they come?

He noticed Mališa, who, worn out, still red in the face, and all huddled up on the snowy track, looked even smaller. Did Mališa, in his village-headman fashion, think and feel the same? It looked as if he did. Lighting a cigarette, Mališa said: "We must attack again. We must reform quickly." Stojan Stanković, too, must have had the same remorseless feeling. Hurrying along the track, with his arm slung from his neck in a dirty rag, pale and perspiring, he appeared to be talking to himself: "I must take

care the bloody bastards don't get me among the first, so that the men don't get scattered."

"Soldiers, brothers, rally, rally, action, action!" Petar Žurić suddenly shouted at the top of his voice, to the soldiers, to himself, to space.

14

About ten o'clock the Montenegrins launched another attack on Razvršje and Uloševina.

Uloševina was attacked by the Uskok battalion—fresh, up to full strength, with men rested and well fed. They were from a highland country that had been settled by farmer rebels who had slipped out of Turkey into Montenegro, tall, healthy men, simple and shrewd, as mountaineers often are. Hallooing and inciting each other, they simply flattened the Austrians in a short-lived fight. This action was more like a brawl; there were more bashed heads and battered jaws than slit bellies.

The Uskoks held their position by repulsing all the Austrian attacks in the afternoon.

On a bare hillside, unentrenched, and unaccustomed to taking cover, they suffered heavy casualties, especially from gunfire. A wry joke later spread through the army to the effect that, when the shells began to thud, these men, so simple in their ways and so linked by family ties, crowded together, shouting: "All get together! The devils have got our range." And one of their songs has survived: "When the Denbaz howitzer strikes, Doctor Zarubica cannot help us." The front-line medical officer, Dr. Zarubica, came from their part of the country and was extremely popular; he tended to their wounds and lamented over them. But they never gave ground, right to the end. The battalion was halved.

The action at Razvršje was more protracted and more complicated. The recruit battalions came to grips with the Austrians without much ado. The latter repeated their earlier counterattacks in waves. Individual sections of the recruits were driven back down the hill, but at once returned to the hurly-burly. Again they were driven back, but Stojan's battalion came up behind them, followed by Mašan's and Petar's battalion. Petar was killed during the attack.

The Montenegrins found their wounded and prisoners slaughtered. They took no prisoners themselves. For the first time in the war with Austria, the spirit of vengeance took on its sternest and most extreme aspect. All means were good that would take life at a given moment. Rifle, sword, sticks and stones, nails and teeth. Throats were torn out, eyes gouged, entrails scattered around.

In such a melee the Austrians could not resist an enemy who was smaller in number, worse clad, more exhausted, and less well equipped than they were. They retreated, more astounded than cowed, more winded than destroyed. The battle of Mojkovac had passed its peak.

As soon as they had taken Razvršje, and for the first time since the beginning of the war, the Montenegrins turned, almost without an order given, to digging pits, arranging the Austrian trenches, and walling themselves in with stones. They were driven to this by their longing to kill an ever greater number of the enemy, rather than by alarm at their own losses.

In the afternoon, about two o'clock, General Rainel took the lead of his faltering troops and passed to the counterattack. This later earned him the Order of Maria Theresa, but he did not take the position.

With strong artillery support, he fell upon Razvršje and on Uloševina and on Mjeden Guvno. He failed to take Uloševina, but dug himself in on the slope that falls from

there toward Lepenac, around the road to Bijelo Polje. He failed to take Mjedeno Guvno, too. The thick woods around that place and the extension of the whole position up the spur of Bjelašica made it possible for him to get above the Montenegrins and exert pressure on them. But this possibility he had had before. He did not take Razvršje either, but there, too, he held his ground. He did take one side of it, the side near Uloševina, while the Montenegrins held the side toward Mjedeno Guvno. His position there was extremely precarious. His flank and rear were threatened by Uloševina, so that he had to secure himself by a semicircular emplacement, and he suffered endless casualties. The two adversaries remained in these positions on the crest of the ridge, at a distance, in places, of not more than three hundred yards—able to abuse, challenge, and observe each other. The Austrians could not move toward Mojkovac, nor the Montenegrins toward Lepenac. Night pinned them both down, and they hurriedly began to fortify themselves. Both commanders were on the ground, on the dueling ground.

15

As the day progressed, the casualty list at Mojkovac grew steadily longer. Some had been lying there for two days—since Christmas Eve—those whose relatives had not been able to get to them. The medical authorities had sanctioned a delay of two or three days in removing them, since the frost prevented the bodies decaying. Around this line of unburied dead, which continued to lengthen although bodies were continually being taken away, the women swarmed all day long, fearful of recognizing one of their own people, petrified if they found one. Often they hauled a body from the front with the help of soldiers.

Mojkovac was the resting place of the dead and wounded.

The wounded were carried across the Tara, into the schools and peasant cottages. The dead stayed where they were, until relatives came or until the soldiers and townsfolk—women, for the most part—carried them at last to burial.

Toward evening, Battalion Commander Mališa brought the body of his second-in-command, Petar Žurić, to be buried in the Mojkovac graveyard. Over the grave, over the torn entrails and the face of his lieutenant—lean and like a carving in stone, yet retaining Petar's features and expression—the old commander made his lament: "Oh my son, who will lead my soldiers? At whose side shall I fight, oh my comfort?" And when the soldiers began to shovel earth on the body, Mališa moved quickly and turned away, as if afraid to see Petar's face covered with earth, beating his head with his fist. "Oh my son, my strength, my sword!"

All around, women were keening, for their own people, for their friends, for the Montenegrin Army. Mojkovac was an inexhaustible spring of wailing and lamentation.

Dobrana from Rećin recognized her husband, Radoje, among the dead at Mojkovac. She reached the battlefield about midday, during a lull, and found his company, but he was not there. She had brought him some food and a change of clothing, and the news that a son had been born to him. Some told her that he had been killed, others that he was wounded. At some point she missed the stretcher-bearers; then she went back to Mojkovac. There Radoje was waiting for his wife, at the end of the file of dead—alone. She unbuttoned his jacket to see his wounds; it gave her a share in his sufferings. She knew that now he was beyond all pain, but this had to be done: "A blessing on your wounds, Radoje." Then she began to talk to Radoje, to herself, and perhaps to the women gathered around her.

Dobrana had never been beautiful. Her attraction had lain in her strength, in her whole body, in her height, in her movements. Her black eyes, which were crossed, afraid of nothing, and pleased with everything, drew one's attention, as did her long limbs, her broad back, her firm step, her thick eyebrows, and her rows of white teeth, sharp as a wolf's.

That was what she had been once, thirty years ago. She appealed to men who wanted a good worker in the house and a woman to bear children, and to those, too, who longed to wear themselves out in a tussle with such strength. Now she was a bony, mature woman, with coarsened features and calloused hands—more like a man.

Of a poor but respectable family, she had married early into a good home, Radoje's, where her father and brothers had told her she must go. Radoje had been a good husband. He, too, had been very young, an only son of small, thin, cramped, but tenacious people. His parents were delighted: two strains were being crossed; there would be a good crop.

But there were no children, for years. They tried the wisewoman, they went to the doctors, they even made a pilgrimage to the church at Ostrog. She remained as barren as a stone. If they had not got along, and if Radoje had agreed, she would long ago have let him marry another woman. Why should a house go to ruin, a line be cut off, because of her? That would be a sin on her soul. But Radoje understood the depth of her distress and would not separate from her. A melancholy old age is easier borne together.

In the end she herself finished the affair by bringing him a woman, neat, plain, and poor, but young and healthy. Radoje objected and made fun of her. When had a wife ever found a wife for her husband? But on the first night she brought the girl into the room, she stood in front of

Radoje and said: "If you won't take this girl, I shall leave your house—and my house, Radoje—because I can't be the one who puts out your candle."

In this way she found a wife for Radoje. To the girl she was as kind as a mother. People understood this, less by reason than by instinct, in a country where men so often lose their lives or die. The authorities, too, let it pass; the girl was accepted as another servant in his house.

At last, when Radoje came on leave in the spring, the girl became pregnant. Dobrana had hurried to the front to gladden Radoje with the news that a son had been born to him and to share his joy. And now she told him, as though he were not dead: "A son was born to you, a son, and such a son! Now, Radoje, your name won't die out and your family won't be cut off."

She neither wailed nor keened, not because it was not fitting for a wife—was she in fact still a wife?—to weep for her husband before other people, but because there was still so much work to be done. Radoje would have to be carried to the village, a whole day's journey away; she could find no bearers and she had no horses. His son would come to know him when he sought his father's grave; and Radoje would be glad if his son came. Never mind; for the time being she would have to bury him somewhere here. Then she would go home to the farm to attend to his property. There would be the rearing of Radoje's son. She could not leave anything of Radoje's to anyone else.

Her tears rose unbidden. She brushed them away and held them in check; Radoje would not have approved of her grieving at his death.

Movement from the front and toward it was very active. News would have spread quickly even if there had been no battle, and even if soldiers from this part of the country had not been engaged in it.

As soon as the young bride Stanija, from a village nearby,

heard that her husband, Milosav, had been wounded, she ran, for all her shyness, to the battlefield. She found him in a house at Mojkovac; he had just been examined and his wound dressed. She walked beside his stretcher, smoothing the matted hair away from his forehead. She did it not because the hair was in his way, but because his forehead was a fine one, white and high. And perhaps he would open his eyes when he felt and recognized her hand. It was cold, the frost tore at one's nails and bit one's eyes, but his forehead was covered with sweat; he was in great pain. "Look at me Milosav. It's I, Stanijă. It's my hand." Milosav said nothing, but clenched his lips and his jaws. His eyes were closed; he twitched and stretched himself out beneath the blanket she had brought and with which she had covered him. Slowly, at last, he opened his eyes. He did not know where he was. He heard her voice. She asked him: "A little brandy, or a slice of apple?" She always saved things for him. Yes, he knew that she always would. She spoke to him in mild reproach. Great beads of sweat broke out on his forehead. His vitals were being torn apart, the life was being wrenched out of him, before her eyes.

In spite of poverty, they had married for love. They rose from their poverty and loved each other even more. He built a cottage and terraced a garden; she reared a cow and did a lot of knitting and spinning. They lived in peace and in happiness.

She was small and lively, talkative and sensitive; he was patient, rather inattentive, even toward his children—a daughter and a son—but hard-working and thrifty. They were a peasant couple, like any other, but also with a character of their own.

She would like now to have Milosav's placidity. He must not gather from her that perhaps he might die, and she dared not so much as think of it, in case he might guess. But it was more than she could manage. She pulled herself

together. What's come over me? I must, she thought, I absolutely must, behave as if nothing were wrong. But how, how?

Milosav had come to; he even lifted his head and cursed: "Stop, I can't go on, let me die!" The bearers carried him on, as if they had not heard, and she comforted him: "It's only a little way and we shall be home." But she thought: Home, will it still be his home? He heard her, his wife, Stanija. Perhaps he had the same thoughts of home as she did. He asked feverishly, with dry lips: "The Tara, have we crossed the Tara? No? Get across the Tara as quick as you can!"

They got within sight of the bridge, to the edge of the Mojkovac Plain. Milosav begged them again to set him down. She did the same. Used to all the whims of wounded men, the bearers hesitated, then finally set him down. It meant they could smoke a while.

Milosav stretched himself out, hunched himself up, ground his teeth. In this convulsion there was, she noticed, some terrible, unknown force, pounding against itself, wanting to crush him. "Don't twist about so, Milosav, don't wear yourself out." But he continued to twist and turn; he did not even hear her appeal. Was he dying? She must behave properly, as she should, and that would make it easier for him. He gave in, broke down, and begged her in tears: "Don't you cry, Stana, not you." With an effort he raised his hand and wiped her face; her tears fell on his face. "I'm crying!" she said in surprise, and felt her eyes. She noticed he was calling her "Stana!" as if they were alone. Then he seemed to reflect a little, or else had no strength to speak. He added something in a lower voice: "You know, I know—you are sad. I, too. People die, they have to die. Look after our son. Don't let him forget me. And don't you forget me. I forgive. Say you forgive me. Everything."

Milosav seemed lost; he was having hallucinations, was dying. Dying.

What had Stanija to forgive him? She could not remember a single bad moment. Yes, there had been words, misunderstandings, as there are bound to be between husband and wife. What a sweet life she had had with him! Poverty did not bother her, and life flowed by effortlessly. And what would become now of her life, of her youth? A son, a daughter.

She talked to him hastily, more and more hastily. She did not know herself what she was saying—something nice to ease his pain. But he seemed not to believe her, not to hear her. She questioned him, plucked at him. He had gone. There, on the bank of the Tara, within sight of home.

Whenever later she was in front of the house, she would look that way and remember him and his sufferings. But just now she did not think of that. Could there be a home without Milosav? She was taking him home, dead. She would keep the house going, the children, the patch of land. That she knew without giving it any thought. It was the wife's inherited duty and destiny.

Everything turned to stone—the water, the hill. Heaven and earth wavered. Everything sank into a white wilderness, into Stanija's cry: "My life!"

A mother from Upper Morača stopped with a horse in front of the watchtower to ask: "Isn't there anyone here who will help me to load my son's body?" She made the request as if it had been for some other purpose—if her lips had not been baked dry and her eyes had not had that dry gleam in them—as if she were asking help in loading hay or wood.

An officer and two soldiers came out. Having passed through the fire of wars, casualties, and disasters of every kind, they were not in the least excited. The officer was

here on liaison duty; an order might come through. Still, he would help her; so would the soldiers. They did help others when need arose. There was a war on, and they were not particular about what they were and what they were not obliged to do.

But she was weak and too old; she could not take her son home by herself: home was a long way off—two winter days' journey, with snow and hills—and the saddle would slip. The old woman pleaded, almost argued. "Am I to leave him here among foreigners, this last son of mine, like the other three—two at Scutari, one in Bulgaria? So he has no one to light his funeral candle for him either?" She had gone the round of three villages before she had managed to hire this nag—the war had devoured even more horses than men—and to give up now! But there's always some good soul on the way who will help.

The officer felt sorry for the old woman. He tried to dissuade her. "Bury him here for the time being; then you can move him later." The old woman did not hear or did not listen. She was obstinate. They were getting ready to leave, but finally they came back.

The loading took a long time. The body was frozen stiff and would not drape over the saddle. The limbs cracked as they slung it over by force. Tying it on was awkward. They managed it at last, and the mother went off, leading her load behind her and murmuring: "What would I do without his grave?"

A girl from Rovci came to Razvršje after the battle, on the first day of Christmas. She wanted to see her brothers, three of them, the eldest an ensign. The ensign and one other had been killed.

The colors were given to brave men. It was a great honor to carry them. It was no more than an honor, since the rank that goes with it was a lowly one, on a level with a noncommissioned officer. But it was a great honor all the

same, because the colors were handed down in the family; the families who carry the colors are known and remembered. The man who bears them goes foremost into battle; one must be brave for that. And when an ensign fell, one of his relatives—a brother, a son, a cousin—was on the watch to seize the colors, and then they were his.

The third brother had not seized the colors. He had been afraid or else had not been there.

The sister wept for her brothers and for the colors. She urged her brother to ask the commanding officer to hand him the colors. The brother was reluctant. It was awkward because he had not happened to have been on the spot, and in this war it was not so important for the colors to remain in a family. The sister imagined the worst and asked her brother: "If you had not taken fright, should I have been mourning all my brothers?" He swore this was not so. She went with him to the commanding officer—and they got the colors.

At Mojkovac the sister flung herself upon the bodies of her dead brothers and wept aloud. She mourned for them both; her tears were for the love between brother and sister, the purest of all and all she had. She wept for her brothers as they had been, as they should have been in their clan and for her, and for their being lost to their country and to her. And she gave them comfort; the colors had stayed in the family. She comforted her people; the colors had not fallen. She thought of finding comfort for herself in this. But for the sister there was no comfort.

At Mojkovac the Montenegrin women—sisters, mothers, wives—went around among the dead. They arrived with presents and offerings, with greetings and wishes, which, finding no one to give them to, they now gave to the Montenegrin dead, their own and others'. All their gifts—stockings, scarves, food, their love and their hopes—were

laid out on the snow, on the bodies. They summoned to battle and to grief.

Not one of them forgot the recent disaster that had plunged the country into mourning, even without this battle—the ship with volunteers from America which the Austrians had sunk at San Giovanni di Medua, within sight of Montenegro. More than three hundred Montenegrins had been drowned, barely a hundred had swum to shore. They had been from every part of the country; grief had fallen on every village, every clan. If only they had fallen in battle! Instead, an inhuman force had swallowed them up within sight of their homeland, so that they could not so much as set foot on it.

Misfortune treads on the heels of misfortune. The mourners lamented the Montenegro that had been swallowed by the insatiable sea. They exalted the Montenegro that stood defiant among its rocks and forests and in the breasts of men and whose guns had withstood the might of a whole empire.

Mojkovac was stifled, with graveyards too small, the earth black.

Razvršje was unsubdued.

16

As if to ensure that the whole of Christmas should be passed in bloodshed, the battle continued on the third day of the holiday. Perhaps the senior officers had great plans—the Austrians to win the high ground, fling themselves into Mojkovac, and cross the Tara; the Montenegrins to pass beyond Lepenac and seize Cer. But the troops did what they were able to do—carried out minor counter-attacks and brief flanking movements, built up their de-

fenses, and clashed in reinforced patrols. There was a good deal of abusing and challenging; with a number of Croats and Serbs in the Austrian Army, there was no difficulty in communicating with the Montenegrins. And most of all there was sniping and spying, done with passionate concentration, to catch the enemy's head raised above cover. For the two forces had taken each other's measure; they were evenly matched.

During the battle, the Austrians had about seven thousand fighting troops at Mojkovac, the Montenegrins about six thousand. In the artillery they employed, the Montenegrins were slightly superior, but their guns were rather antiquated. The Austrians had a special superiority in machine guns. Morale was high on both sides. The Austrian Army was well ordered, well disciplined, brave, and confident. The Montenegrins were better as individual fighters and irresistible in groups when a wave of enthusiasm carried them away. This time they were constant even under strong and steady pressure and under gunfire.

The Austrian reinforcements were on their way; but on January 10, on the orders of the high command, the Montenegrins detached a part of their small force for the general reserve at Podgorica.

The positions at Mojkovac remained almost unchanged right up to the capitulation of Montenegro on January 21, when Serdar Janko, as commander in chief, and on the government's orders, issued the proclamation ordering the troops to disperse to their homes. In his order of the day, the Serdar said: "The army will disperse from its positions; consequently no army exists, only the nation."

This was a denial of the whole of Montenegrin history.

The Montenegrins were what they were because they were a nation in arms. By this action the government and the leading men at the court also denied their own existence, since they had originated, and continued to exist

as, the leaders of the nation in arms. Now, in a moment of desperate lack of faith, they had adjured precisely this—the nation in arms—and their own existence.

It is known now, and was surmised then, that the Serdar was against the capitulation and the disbanding of the army. As a soldier, he communicated the government's decision to the army; but he did not support with a single word this decision which was not his own. And what could he have done anyway, in the milieu to which he belonged and with a ruler who listened to him only when he spoke in the name of the government, the court, and the ruling class?

He did then what was the hardest thing of all, almost impossible. He rose above his surroundings, he preserved what was truly human in himself, he remained faithful to the army, which no longer existed—to the nation. After reciting the government's decision, the Serdar thanked the officers and soldiers "for their heroic, glorious, and honorable military conduct, even though this has so far been of no avail."

The King left the country on January 19. The Prime Minister and Queen Milena, with her daughters, Xenia and Vjera, had already left on the eighteenth. The Serdar knew this. Throughout the country the authority of the state began to crumble. The Serdar concluded his order: "I shall not go anywhere outside Montenegro. I shall remain here to endure with my comrades in arms all the difficulties which await us." That was his moral duty. For the army, for the nation in arms, it was little; for him, it was everything. Serdar Janko had started the battle of Mojkovac as commander. He had only enough strength to finish it like a man.

It was not Mojkovac that had given way, but the Montenegrin government and state. The Austrians were right in considering the battle undecided from the military

point of view. But this battle was not merely the settling of military accounts (if there is such a thing as a purely military reckoning), nor the conflict of ideas (if there is such a thing as a pure conflict of ideas). It was a testing of all the powers of the two peoples, and an affirmation of the Montenegrin will and strength to continue living as Montenegrins on their own soil.

The Montenegrins were right in claiming that they had won the battle. They had asserted themselves in spite of the disintegration and the cowardice of their rulers. In terms of wars, this was a minor battle. To the Montenegrins it was a major one; the enemy had been obliged to acknowledge their inner resistance as unconquerable. Even when everything was lost—the war and the state—this superiority remained.

Even for great and powerful Austria-Hungary, Mojkovac was a major battle. In an equal fight—even with a certain preponderance of strength—against forces that had had no prospect of winning the war, the Austrians had shown themselves the weaker. They were able to overrun this army, this country, this people, and did so, but they never subdued them. Mojkovac revealed to them that the inconceivable, immeasurable creative genius that exists in every nation and in every living thing remained unimpaired and predominant in the Montenegrins. They had overthrown only what was already in decay—the court, the state, the ruling power, the ruling caste of chieftains.

In this minor-major battle, the casualties were matched—comparatively high. The Austrians officially admitted to seven hundred dead. The actual figure must have been over a thousand. The Montenegrin losses were hardly, if at all, smaller. And since in this war there were two men wounded to every man killed, it follows that both armies were practically halved in the course of four, or, rather,

two, days—the first and second days of Christmas—on a front of less than two miles.

Both armies and both peoples were appalled at the high casualties. But the Montenegrins felt almost a joy and emphasized with pride the number of their losses in the battle of Mojkovac. They were confident that the Austrians must be in despair; a story spread among the people that the commander of the Austrian troops killed himself when he saw the battlefield and learned of the number of dead and wounded.

Some years after the battle, shepherds used to tell how Austrian bones and skulls were to be found on the ridges and in the watercourses of Mojkovac. Trepidation and terror came over those who saw them, terror in the face of the unknown, in the face of what was left of human beings, but also a joyful pride that the Austrians had been left there, unburied.

THE GALLOWS

The Austrian occupation was not a brutal one. Not a child was killed, not a woman violated. But the Montenegrins rightly considered it an act of force and injustice. The Austrian administration, meticulous to the point of soullessness, ingeniously attached itself to the existing system of government, put the local authorities under its control, and had trade and education soon functioning successfully.

The Austrian soldier saw the Montenegrins as semi-savages who sang as if shouting from one hilltop to another, who wore peculiar clothes, and who loved plundering above all things. But the military commanders behaved respectfully toward the traditions and the great figures of the nation. For example, when Vojvoda Ilija Plamenac, for many years Montenegrin minister of war, died at the age of a hundred and seven, the Austrian Army rendered him full honors. And even the removal of the bones of Njegoš from Lovćen—undertaken later as a reply to open revolt, since the poet's grave was a symbolic incitement to rebellion—was done only with the co-operation of the Montenegrin ecclesiastical authorities.

But the occupation itself was an evil, disrupting the whole course of national life. Disagreements soon broke out between Austria and the local authorities over their rights and functions. Austria was unable to avoid the mistake made by all conquerors: it demanded and took to itself more than even the most pacifically disposed parts of the population could hand it. And Montenegro's position had not been clearly regulated by agreement.

The Montenegrin government and King Nikola had applied to the government at Vienna and to Emperor Franz Josef for peace terms on January 13, 1916. The reply had come on January 15. Montenegrin troops were to be disarmed; Serbian troops were to be handed over, though there were, in fact, no longer any on Montenegrin soil; Austrian military commanders were to administer the territory, but through the agency of Montenegrin authorities. The government had accepted these terms, but the Prime Minister and the King had departed from the country, leaving behind three ministers and the King's second son, Prince Mirko.

This remnant of the government ordered—not wholly in accordance with the spirit of the armistice—the disbandment of the army, and on January 25 an understanding was reached that their arms be collected and kept in three depots until the conclusion of peace. Austria, however, first demanded that the King delegate his full powers, and the three ministers requested him to do so. The Prime Minister, meanwhile, issued a declaration stating that an armistice had only been sought to gain time, that the King had given orders for resistance and for the army's withdrawal along with the Serbs, and that nobody had the right to negotiate an armistice, let alone make peace. The miserable surrender of Montenegro was for years a source of contention between the adherents and the opponents of King Nikola, who were at the same time, respectively, the opponents and the adherents of union with Serbia. The latter were particularly persistent in trying to prove the treachery of the King and his government.

There had actually been no betrayal. King Nikola had outfoxed himself this time. Yet what could he have done? As an independent state, Montenegro had reached an impasse. The King wanted independence because it meant the maintenance of the dynasty and of his own despotic

power. Therefore he had sought an agreement with Austria. But he was also a good Serb, and he had been unable to take any open or decisive action until the collapse of Serbia and until Montenegro itself had fallen into a situation from which there was no way out. Even then, torn between the preservation of Montenegrin independence and the union of all Serbs, he could do nothing conclusive. The three ministers remained behind to maintain authority and come to terms with Austria, while the King fled to the Allies to continue the war without an army. One may speak of vacillation, of faintheartedness, of confusion, or of lack of vision, but not of betrayal. The King did not betray the Serbs. If he betrayed anything—and he did—it was the Montenegrin Army and the Montenegrin state. Every man betrays himself and that which he is.

To this very day the reasons for the surrender of the Montenegrin Army remain unexplained. The Serbian colonel Petar Pešić, who was head of the Montenegrin High Command until Serdar Janko Vukotić replaced him in January 1916, later wrote that he had so disposed and directed the Montenegrin Army as to make impossible a withdrawal with the Serbs. He had thus prevented the simultaneous existence of two Serb armies abroad, standing for two separate states and thus rendering union impossible. In spite of this maneuvering, which served neither the Serb nor the Allied interests, the Montenegrin Army could still have withdrawn. Up to the very capitulation, on January 21, the Montenegrins had a loophole for escape—Scutari—and later a battalion of Hercegovinian volunteers broke into Albania, determined to perish rather than surrender to the Austrians.

The Montenegrin leaders lacked this kind of resolution. They reasoned that, even though the King had taken refuge with the Allies and had continued the war formally, there was still a good chance that the Central Powers

would win, and it would thus be unwise to strain relations with Austria. The army's withdrawal after the Serbians would have meant a final rupture with Austria as well as a capitulation to Serbia. Under such circumstances the surrender followed inevitably. The Montenegrin Army was not defeated; it was disarmed by its own government.

After the capitulation, Vienna insisted on either a treaty of peace or a regime of occupation—meaning the introduction of its own local authorities. The Montenegrin ministers were unable to accept either alternative. Austria, however, was strong enough to impose its will. The ministers were dismissed and an occupation regime was set up.

Even those who had favored an agreement with Austria realized that this was a breach of the armistice terms. The ordinary Montenegrin was indignant, too. In a country of thirty-seven hundred square miles, with a population of less than three hundred thousand, half of whom knew each other by sight and were connected by ties of blood and other relationships, the negotiations with Austria could not be concealed. There were whispers of surrender, bargaining, and betrayal. The King had in public sworn that he would not leave the country, and the army leaders that they would not surrender. And yet that was what had happened. Montenegrins, especially the soldiers, were not prepared to accept occupation, because, hungry and short of ammunition as they were, and abandoned by their allies, they nevertheless wanted to fight and had not been beaten in open battle.

The Montenegrin authorities were dismissed; the number of arrests increased. The Austrians soon introduced a new measure: internment of the fighting population. Conflict was imminent. A spark was all that was needed.

And a spark was struck.

An Austrian patrol was dispatched to bring Brigadier Radomir Vešović, Minister of War in the late government,

who had retired to his village, to the District Commander at Kolašin. Vešović replied with revolver shots, killed an officer, and escaped. His example was followed by many. The Austrians responded by the mass internment of adult males. Hangings started. At Kolašin they hanged Vešović's brother Vladislav, a law student—apparently as an act of reprisal rather than for any crime of his own. The forests soon swarmed with guerrilla bands—both supporters and opponents of the King—and also with common freebooters.

Montenegro had everything needed for an insurrection except for two important particulars—without which there can be no insurrection—a party with settled convictions and a single leader. The King's party did not favor the uprising, and Vešović lacked the characteristics of a leader. Swarthy, slim, a mass of nerves and gestures, arrogant in speech, quick in action, he was one of those extraordinary, but by no means rare, Montenegrins who flinch at nothing in battle but are mercurial and unstable in politics. He had fired at the Austrians because he had felt personally insulted. But behind the feeling of insult lay the embitterment of all those who had looked for an honorable peace with Austria.

In the woods Vešović showed no particular spirit of enterprise. The idea of raising a rebellion, and thereby straining relations with Austria to breaking point, was as far from his followers in the country as it was from the King in exile. But if King Nikola's adherents were too weak to achieve revolt, they were too strong to leave such a course to others. Although the rebels acted without any co-ordination, they presented a problem to the occupying power. They were in fact both more numerous and more active than were those in Serbia. But Montenegro had not Serbia's unity of spirit.

Vešović later surrendered to the Austrian authorities, in hopes again of an agreement with Austria, and he led

many, especially partisans of the King, to surrender, though not because he became frightened or because he sold himself. He was simply an old type of Montenegrin hero in a cowardly cause, an unreality in a world of unrealities.

After the collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918, at the time of the unification of Montenegro and Serbia, it was alleged that Vešović planned an insurrection which was to have been supported by Italian troops from the Gulf of Kotor. He was never at pains to deny the charge, and was acquitted by a court of law. He lived until the eve of World War II in the condition of a loyal malcontent and nonconspiring conspirator.

The true biography of Vešović is the story of the fall of Montenegro. What follows is the fictitious biography of his brother—here called Miloš Milošević—who never did anything worthy of note, unless an honorable death be accounted the most noteworthy thing of all.

I

They were waiting for the Captain.

It must have been about nine o'clock already. They were given a can of water, which other prisoners had carried up from a nearby spring. It was from this that Miloš had reckoned the time. The old man, on the other hand, had a different way of working it out—from the shadows and from his own feeling of hunger, which was related to the hour the cattle were led home and milked in his village.

That morning the gypsy prisoner who brought in their daily barrel of water and took away the barrel of night soil had avoided an encounter with the eyes of any of them. Miloš had been positive he had seen in the gypsy's eyes surprise, if not sorrow. He dared not define to himself that

look, because it seemed to spring from the gypsy's surprise at finding them all still alive. The Captain had not been there to notice it. It would not have escaped him though; the Captain was no dullard. The old man, too, had perceived it in his own fashion, as he did everything else, and had given expression to the feeling. "Look at this gypsy. Dog's faith, even he feels a twist at his heart when he sees us—alive, yet dead."

They had been condemned to death.

The sentence had been confirmed the day before.

It was their last day.

Now there were two of them: Miloš Milošević, a student of philosophy and law, and old Vuk Rovčanin. Rovčanin was not his surname, but derived from the name of the village from which he came. People had called him that for years, and he usually referred to himself by the name of his clan, and not without pride. The third man under sentence, Captain Draško Dragović, had been taken away early that morning.

Miloš and the old man thought that the Captain had been taken to a meeting with his wife and son.

Now they waited for him impatiently, although they were glad that the Captain could be a little cheered by this meeting. They had avoided mentioning, even to themselves, that this would be the Captain's last meeting with his family. But they knew that this was so, and it was impossible to banish or to dodge this knowledge. They could only keep silent about it. The old man had given vague expression to it as the Captain was being taken away. "Eh, the Captain, he'll be glad and he'll be sorry."

Their impatience at the Captain's absence was plain to see. They had grown so used to each other that, in a manner of speaking, each one of them lived in all three. Now there was an almost deliberate ostentation in their impatience. Miloš was pacing up and down, and the old man

was smoking his fifth, or possibly his tenth, cigarette, holding it clumsily and singeing his drooping mustaches. He had lost his pipe in a tussle with some Austrian soldiers after abusing one of them, and was now forced to smoke tobacco rolled in paper. "What a plight the enemy have reduced me to in my old age!" he had said.

They had not been together long enough to get as sick of each other as men do in prison. It was but eighteen days since they had thrust the Captain into Miloš's cell, and fifteen since they had brought in Vuk Rovčanin. The reason for their closeness was not merely their living together, though this made the time pass more quickly and helped them pluck up courage and dispel each other's anxieties; their closeness also fused into one their individual lives, so different in every respect, under the impact of a common calamity. Each one of them was secretly convinced that he would go on living only so long as the other two did. They grew restless if one of them was taken away, and rejoiced and grieved as one. On one occasion the Captain had remarked that it had been a piece of luck for them that the Kolašin prison had so few cells. The authorities had been obliged to put them together to ensure that none of them came in contact with the outside world through the other prisoners.

This curious closeness had increased after the death sentence six days ago, and they had grown more keenly aware of its presence and of its importance to each of them. From that day on, they had not been released for exercise or even to relieve themselves, and this complete isolation forced them to turn toward each other.

But since noon of the day before, when they had been informed that the sentence would be carried out in forty-eight hours, there had been a change. Not that any one of them ceased to care about the other two, but, rather, there emerged irrepressibly in each of them the realization of

his own end as something inevitable, which would strike regardless of what might happen to his friends or to the rest of the world. Unable to conceal anything, the Captain had defined this feeling as soon as they returned from the trial. "I would give my head for a fingernail of any one of you, but all I keep thinking of is my own head."

Therefore their restlessness because of the Captain's absence, as well as their pleasure at the thought that he might see his family, appeared to Miloš, if not false, then simply an attempt to force themselves to go on living and thinking in a reality that had existed only until the death sentence. After that—indeed, while the sentence was still being read—another reality had emerged, a reality more real than any other, the only reality.

Each of them went on living, obstinately and unyieldingly, in the same manner and with the same habits as before. And so the same close connection between them had continued. Each of them emphasized this, gladly, assertively. But each also concealed, as far as he could—if he could—that other world of his own, his own personal fate, which clearly was identical with the fate of the other two but which was at the same time uniquely his own.

2

Until the day before, they had had hope—even the old man, who had had no serious grounds for hoping. But he had gladly listened to the explanations the other two offered which favored their salvation. That was his hope and his consolation.

Miloš had not seriously thought that he would be condemned to death until the very moment the sentence was pronounced.

It had been late one morning when an Austrian officer

had politely entered his brother's house. Miloš had continued sitting on the landing of the stone stairs that ran alongside the outer wall of the house. A noncommissioned officer and two soldiers were relaxing on the woodpile in front of the house, handing cigarettes around. They had scarcely lighted them when two faint, muffled shots came from the house. Miloš rushed inside. In the corridor he encountered a smell of powder and his brother, who was gripping a revolver so tightly that his knuckles and his nails had turned white. Miloš pushed him back into the room and quickly locked the door in the face of the soldiers, who were already on their way up, their iron-shod army boots pounding outside. Miloš paused while the soldiers battered at the door with their rifle butts. He went into the room to check. His brother had escaped through the window, both casements of which were open to the sunny day. The officer was lying on his face with his hands stretched upward, as if reaching for the cap which had rolled under the bed. Blood was trickling slowly and soundlessly down the sagging floor. He turned the officer over, intending to lift him onto the bed. But he was already dead. Miloš peeped out of the window. One of the soldiers was standing at the corner of the house, bending over to load his rifle. It was then that Miloš realized that he, too, could have escaped if he had not dallied over the officer. He turned back and opened the house door.

He had indeed helped his brother escape. That had been his duty—to help his brother, or any other Serb, if the occupation forces were after him. He understood his brother's action, although at heart he disagreed with it. One of the most distinguished and highest-ranking Montenegrin officers, quick-tempered besides, his brother could not suffer the humiliation of being disarmed and packed off into captivity.

That was Miloš's sole offense. He had put up no resist-

ance, nor had he been in a position to do so. And he had not instigated others.

The Captain's offense was more serious. There had been a rumor, it is true, that the Austrians were preparing to intern all officers; they had been collecting particulars about them. Nevertheless, Captain Draško was both surprised and appalled at the Austrian breach of faith when several officers and two soldiers burst into his house early one morning to lead him off. Until then, officers like himself had lived at liberty, and were even allowed to retain light arms. The Captain felt that, as an officer, he could not let them disarm him, especially there—before his former soldiers. His father and his grandfather had taught him long ago: "Never lose your head without your weapons, nor your weapons without your head." And that pointless surrender of the Montenegrin Army, which was now slipping into a humiliating enslavement, had caused bitter dissatisfaction among many, including himself. Were Montenegrins really no longer capable of defending their own good name? He pulled out his revolver. The first bullet missed; the second jammed. They overpowered him and led him away.

He asked himself: "Must a Montenegrin officer really be condemned to death for having defended himself against being disarmed and arrested by the very authorities who had guaranteed him his liberty and the retention of his arms? Did the civilized Austrians give no weight to moral and spiritual motives in their assessment of a criminal act?"

The old man's offense, on the other hand, was undisputed. He had gone out to cut wood. He was lopping off branches from the already-trimmed beech and oak scrub along the road. Around noon he walked down to the river, and what a sight did he see there! Three Austrian soldiers in the middle of Rovci! Two were stripped, washing their

clothes, and the third, stripped only to the waist, was sitting in the road, delousing his shirt. This man was red-haired and freckled, his white skin burned red in exposed places. And this spectacle right in front of the whole village! Before Vuk's very own eyes!

Vuk had heard that the Montenegrins were taking to the woods and that the Austrians were to be exterminated wherever possible. If only he could steal up to them! But the red-haired soldier noticed him, gave him a smile, and said something in a foreign language—a language that sounded obscene when spoken in the middle of Rovci. Vuk was thinking that if only he could knock this one out and grab his weapon, he could manage the other two easily. He wondered where their rifles might be, probably somewhere in the scrub. The main thing was to outwit the soldier in the road.

Vuk began to loll his tongue and to mumble unintelligible words, as if to make himself understood by the soldier and get the better of him. The soldier smiled again and offered him his tobacco box. "You damn bastard, I don't smoke that muck!" said Vuk angrily. The soldier did not understand, shrugged, and went on with his delousing, muttering something. That, too, angered Vuk. "Who are you laughing at, eh? And in the middle of Rovci, too, my home!"

And what a home it was! A cleft between two towering crags, cut off from the rest of the world. No stranger's foot had ever trodden it against the will of the villagers, the only clan that had never paid a poll tax to the Turks.

Vuk skirted around the soldier, as if in the direction of the beechwood, having decided to kill him with his ax. For a second or two he deliberated whether to hit him with the haft; from the weight on his shoulder he felt that the blade was pointed downward. But there was something

odious about such an action; he was a man, why kill him like a pig?

He quickly turned the haft right side up, and then, from the shoulder, struck the soldier across his bowed neck.

It was not the first time he had cut off a head, but the fighting with the Turks was a long time ago. He knew that a man's neck was not tough and that the main thing was to sever the spine so that the man fell unconscious and never got up again.

The bone cracked, the wound gaped and spurted blood, drenching the space around, as well as Vuk's mind with the familiar rapture of revenge. The soldier sprawled on the ground noiselessly; only his blood—or was it the river?—gurgled. The old man grabbed the soldier's gun. But the gun was different from the ones he was used to handling. The two naked soldiers rushed at him. Vuk knew he could not escape, and seized the ax again. The soldiers' prompt hands overpowered him and held him firmly.

But in what circumstances had all this happened? If the Austrians were determined to destroy them—and they clearly were—in order to set an example and without regard to the offense itself, might not circumstances change and operate in the opposite sense, so that they might be released without regard to the offense committed? The Austrians obviously meant to drive it into the heads of the Montenegrins that their country was under occupation. But could they not see that drastic sentences might provoke uncontrollable resistance instead of fear? Would not the Bishop of Cetinje and the Catholic Bishop of Bar intercede for the condemned men? There seemed countless reasons against inflicting the extreme penalty, even in the case of the old man.

The hearings had been conducted in a room specially

fitted for the purpose in a barracks outside the town. The only people present had been the Austrian officials, a few select townspeople, and the mayor.

Among the Austrians there was a strict order in everything. This was also true of the trial: it was brief and correct.

Only the old man maintained that the trial had been too long. They had made up a lot of incomprehensible words, he felt, some trickery out of the lawbooks. He imagined that some high-ranking officer would appear, fasten his eyes on him, and ask him, "Are you So-and-So who did such-and-such?" Vuk would say yes, he was—as he would be bound to do—and the man would order him to be shot—as he, too, was bound to do. But it was quite different. One of the officers even defended him. The court must bear in mind, the defending officer stated, that the accused was an untutored savage who did not know what he was doing. The old man felt compelled to correct him: he was guilty, yes; he was uneducated and came from a savage country, let that stand; but he had been well aware of what he was doing. He had heard that other clans were rising in revolt and had thought it would be disgraceful if the Rovčani allowed foreigners to swagger around a village that had often been visited by Turkish heads but never by Turkish feet.

They were to die by hanging.

The other two men were not pleased with the way in which they were to be executed. But the old man found it particularly distasteful. He knew that it all came to the same thing in the end. He even knew that sometimes bullets did not hit the mark properly, which caused considerable pain to the condemned man. Still, to be shot was a manlier death—cleaner, too. Life is not torn out of a man with ropes and hands. And he expressed this dissatisfaction when asked at the reading of the sentence what he

had to say. But no one had paid any attention to his plea, even if they had not mocked him.

Returning from the trial roped together, as they reached the little bridge over the Svinjača, which is dried up at that time of the year, its bed a gaping mass of stony holes, the Captain had remarked: "Well, nothing will ever part us now." The old man, who was not without a sense of humor, even regarding sacred matters, added to this, in the corridor in front of their cell: "So we shall still be tied together when we face Saint Peter."

But these were words, and wishes. Or they had been until the day before, until the notification. Since then everything had changed, although the words and the wishes remained.

Their lives up to the moment the sentence was pronounced had already been thrown into confusion. Every act and every thought had been overshadowed by death. But the death sentence had changed everything. It was sudden and final. As Miloš had observed, it had severed at a blow, and beyond repair, the outer world from their own inner existence, the existence hitherto hidden even from themselves, hidden from the constant, ineluctable feeling of death. No, not a feeling, but a kind of living presence of death, like the air without which one cannot exist but which continually makes its presence felt in agonizing gasps.

These two worlds—day-to-day life and the living presence of death—manifested themselves side by side, apparently unconnected. Most amazing and most terrible of all, that external existence in which they had hitherto taken part now became altogether unreal and, as it were, super-

fluous. They themselves became unreal within it, with all their actions, thoughts, and desires. The only real, true, and irresistible life was that inner life in which death ruled.

Up to the day before, everything had been a struggle with death.

Since then, since the death sentence, even this struggle had ceased to exist. Now they knew not only that they would die—every human being knows that—but also when they would die. Their death had been irrevocably decreed and confirmed. There was nothing further to be done against death, even in their thoughts. Yet they were still alive—walking, eating, and even sleeping.

Time, hitherto imperceptible, became perceptible, almost tangible. It went no quicker—rather, the contrary—but its passing made itself inescapably felt. The six paces that Miloš took back and forth across the cell were not merely movements made in the course of a definite period of time; they were, above all, six movements, six seconds toward death. When he sank into thought, it became simultaneously, no matter what the ostensible subject, a meditation on death, in the space of a given time. Had not the Captain said last night: "Tonight and one more night to go"?

It was like this not only with time, but with all other things. Death was palpable everywhere and in everything. It was the sole reality. Now, while Miloš and the old man were waiting for the Captain, their happiness for his visit and their sadness for his absence were unreal. The old man could not help saying at last, after perusing the sky seen through the little skylight: "The cattle will have come in from grazing; the Captain's not come yet. And as for us, we're glad and sorry and we don't know for whom or at what." And the old man clumsily rolled another cigarette and took his pouch with the flint and tinder out of his

sash and lit it. Yes, Vuk did this with the same old movements, but even the movements and the man who made them were unreal, were apart from that by which Miloš lived and which he saw to be more real than any sense impressions or any intellectual conclusions.

The most disagreeable thing was that each of them observed in the other two the very same preoccupation with death that he felt himself, and that they, too, perceived the presence of death in everything. As a result, none of them, not even Miloš, was capable of hiding it. And while Miloš did not resent this, he was embarrassed at the thought that they might notice the same in him and that, clever and obstinate as he was, he could not conceal it from them.

As soon as they had returned from the notification, Miloš had at once begun pacing up and down. That in itself was an obvious symptom, even though it was an old habit, and at one point he had burst out: "Still, one's got to die some time," which was a common saying that simply escaped his lips. It had sounded false, or, at any rate, irrelevant on this occasion. It was one of those general truths which did not apply to those who knew when they were to die. He had realized the artificiality of this saying at such a time and had felt ashamed, insofar as shame was not a feeling already beyond him.

He was certain that the other two understood that he had uttered this saying only in order to keep up his courage. But it was evident that they thought none the worse of him for it; it was only he who thought the worse of himself. The frank, fiery Captain had even pointed out the irrelevance of what Miloš had said, as he flung himself down on the paillasse in the corner. "That's just one of those things people say. People say it because they actually face death."

The old man had said nothing. While they themselves kept silent, more depressed than abashed by what they had

so freely uttered, he had taken a bowl of sour cream and a cob of maize from the shelf, and had sat down cross-legged and begun to eat. They had known that the old fellow had no appetite. He had known it, too. Putting down the bowl, he had remarked: "Whenever I'm in trouble—and I've heard the same from other people—it's a good thing to eat. But now, even that doesn't help. A man's not a beast, to see an ax before his eyes but scramble for the trough anyway."

Yesterday even the feeling of injustice and the will to resist had been extinguished.

The internment measures were in full swing, and new prisoners were continually being brought in. So much could be deduced from the words and sounds that came from the courtyard. But resistance to the conqueror, just like the struggle for life itself, had lost all significance for them. Both had simply become realities external to them, things to which they had given everything they had, but also things to which they now neither could give nor wished to give anything, since all giving and all sacrifice were senseless when one no longer had at one's disposal the most important thing of all—one's life. Everything that any of them had ever known or apprehended about life and death had crumbled away—and individually and among them they had known a great deal, from books, from the wars, from long experience. But now all that, too, was unreal and bore no relation to what was really happening to them and in them. Actually, nothing was happening, but something, namely death, had come to exist within them, and they could not avoid recognizing its existence.

Until now, until the death sentence, it had seemed to them senseless to die; now it was inevitable, and the senselessness had lost its significance, and its injustice. Death—living for death and in the midst of death—that was the sole reality.

Miloš noticed this in his own body, which seemed to him

to be dissolving, unraveling. And he noticed, besides, harshly and more brutally, that a rope seemed to be throttling him around the neck, and his Adam's apple seemed to be brushing against his jawbone. He had, since the previous afternoon, begun rubbing his neck to relieve this ever more persistent feeling of friction.

This imaginary irritation was all the more unpleasant because the other two obviously understood it. Yet he could not stop; his hand went up of its own accord every now and then, while at the same time he searched for the reason. Something similar was surely happening to them, too, but he had not yet discovered how they were reacting to death. The old man had been clearing his throat ever since yesterday afternoon, and the Captain spent a remarkably long time clutching his jaw and his eyelids. Neither had done these things before.

The body had no peace. There was no respite. Were they not linked, if not actually identical, this bodily awareness and this mental realization of death as the most complete, the sole reality?

Of course, each of them resisted any admission of the change, either to himself or to the two others, even though it was undeniable. In a different way, it had obviously been remarked and acknowledged by other people—the warders, the gypsy. And the military authorities had known in advance that it would come.

Last evening they sat down to supper at the usual hour, though clearly forcing themselves to do so.

Miloš and Vuk had not received any food from home. Miloš's family either had been arrested or had taken to the woods; anyone else who might have visited him would not

have dared to, even if visiting had been allowed. And since there were no Rovčani this distance from home, and since his two sons had migrated to Metohija, where the war had caught them, Vuk had had only rather remote clan connections nearby. The Captain's wife came every morning—his home was an hour's walk away—and brought him food. The Captain always recognized whom it came from by the type and the way in which it was cooked; his daughter-in-law had made the cake, being a skilled hand at that, one of his godparents had made the pasties, and his son-in-law had cooked the lamb. The Captain shared the food with his companions, and they had called it by the name of the donor—Zlatana's cake, Mikaš's lamb.

Last evening, too, Draško distributed food—cheese and barley cakes—as he always did, slowly and carefully, so each would get a fair share. But it all seemed different, because the mere taking of food was meaningless. The living eat without thinking about it, but what is food to the dead?

While they were eating, the door opened. The Political Commissary, Ungri, the superintendent of the prison and an exceptionally strict man, pushed a soldier into the darkness of their cell. He carried food for them, the condemned men—half a roast lamb, a blue bowl of fresh cream, three pots of jam, three round army loaves, half a liter of brandy, and some boxes of cigarettes. By the offer of good food, the military authorities seemed to confirm the change that had come over the three prisoners at midday.

Ungri was an uncomplicated person, prompt and watchful, contentious and aggressive, though not to the point of striking prisoners. His name did not reveal his nationality, and he himself concealed it. He spoke Montenegrin well, but the language he used most naturally was Hungarian. He was probably a Croat from a region near Hungary. But whatever he was, he did not conceal his hatred and contempt for the people of Montenegro.

On this occasion, however, Ungri was considerate and obliging. His freckled face seemed anxious, and he was not biting his carefully upswept fair mustaches with his lower lip, as was his habit. It seemed as if he dared not look them in the eye, although he normally glared long and unflinchingly at the prisoners with his blue, staring eyes.

As he went out, he said, almost with entreaty: "If there's anything you want, knock, and tell the warder; please don't hesitate. Conditions here are somewhat chaotic, I'm afraid—wartime conditions—but everything will be done." Then he added: "Good night."

Naturally, he was being agreeable because he had to be. The Austrian military authorities, under whom the prison officials came, though severe, kept strictly to the legal regulations in their dealings with prisoners. The officials and police at the depots did not beat the peasants on the least pretext, and in the military prisons it was rare for a finger to be laid even on men guilty of grave offenses. Their laws must have prescribed, or their administration inherited, a considerate attitude toward those condemned to death, including the provision of a good meal. But there was something else in Ungri's conduct. It was as if in him, and in the whole soulless, faceless machine of authority, an incomprehensible human compassion was stirring irresistibly. This could be seen in the fact that of the meal brought by the soldier, only the bread and the cigarettes were army issue; the rest was all homemade—fresher and tastier than anything the three had ever been used to.

Ungri's compassionate conduct and the general humane attitude enjoined by the regulations were not distasteful, even though highly unnatural. Those who would kill them were obliged to show pity—yes, obliged, because in the face of human death, nobody human can remain unmoved. The unnatural character of the pity was made more evident by being expressed through Ungri, whose malice, meticulous-

ness, and egoism were personal features of his no less than his devoted service and his absolute idolatry of the Austrian administration, which it appeared to be impossible to serve in any other way.

When he had gone out, Vuk smiled gently—an expression not native to his bony face—and said what the other two had observed: “Well now, did you see that Ungar?” He said Ungar, and not Ungri, possibly believing, or perhaps intentionally implying, that Ungri meant the same as Ungar, a Hungarian. “Now he would give us his heart’s blood, yet he’s the one who will slip the plank from under us or tie the rope around our necks.”

Then the old man invited them to come to supper, with Ungri’s food now added. “I won’t eat their food,” the Captain remarked. Miloš agreed, but noticed at the same instant that he had said something other than what he ought to have said. It was no longer important whose food it was or whether one should eat it. Something else was at stake. And this was expressed by the old man. “It’s a black business, our eating! Still, we must force ourselves to it. It gives us something to do, and our bellies will be full. We mustn’t just stew in our distress.”

And so they sat down next to the old man. “I am eating the food, and the food is eating me,” said the Captain, but they ate with gusto all the same, slowly, as if they really relished it. It was not so much the food that pleased them—they scarcely noticed what they ate—as the actual process of eating, the chewing and swallowing. They even drank. None of them was a toper, but the brandy was good; it warmed and cheered them. The authorities knew what they were doing: the body accepted food and drink and took pleasure in them. Miloš did not think about the rope.

But the presence of death did not lessen, even for a minute, though now it manifested itself covertly through other things—through the food and drink they were consuming.

Miloš discovered this in his comment "But they haven't brought brandy enough to make us drunk." Was that a desire on his part to get drunk or was it a revelation of the probable Austrian regulation that condemned men were not to be allowed to go to the scaffold in a state of intoxication?

In any case, he felt ashamed, convinced that the others would detect in him a craven desire to get drunk. But if they thought of it, they gave no indication of it. The old man capped him by saying: "And I say that we wouldn't even be able to get drunk." The Captain only gave a nod of agreement. But since he liked to drink a glass or two at supper, and was a connoisseur of good brandy, he raised the potbellied bottle against the lamplight and asserted in a knowledgeable way: "What a fine golden color! That's a real drink—a real Morača plum brandy." He took a swig at the bottle and added, as if to comfort himself: "Perhaps the innkeeper remembered who it was for and decanted his best." No one made any reply, but Miloš at once felt pleasure that the brandy was good and had even been chosen as such for them.

The food and drink had definitely relieved their spirits. Miloš, and undoubtedly the others, too, realized that the burden of death had lifted from the body, but only from the body, and for that reason the body felt better, the body that was as yet unravaged by death.

They had a similar feeling about the light. Since the sentence, a lamp had been burning in their cell all night so that the warder could spy through the keyhole and make sure they did not attempt suicide or escape. The light was a relief to them, because they slept uneasily, feeling even more isolated when they lay down with their thoughts.

Miloš lay down on a blanket of the Captain's folded double, and the Captain lay on the paillasse in the corner. They smoked their customary cigarettes before settling

down to sleep, and the old man, as usual, fidgeted around *clearing up the crockery and food and scraping up the crumbs from the floor with particular fervor, so that the gift of God would not be trodden underfoot.*

Indeed, the old man had from the start taken upon himself the task of clearing up, and even gladly waited on the other two. Yet he did not behave in the least like a servant, nor did he expect anything in exchange. The Captain barely noticed the role the old man had assumed; but to Miloš it seemed that the old man considered it natural that he, a humble man, should wait on people like the other two, even though they were his juniors. The Captain was a captain, and the other one had completed his schooling.

So, that night, too, the old man performed his task, and with such care that Miloš thought death could not weigh too heavily on him. The Captain could not help saying: "I'm astounded, Vuk, at the way in which you can bring yourself to fuss over those crumbs tonight."

The old man went on doing his work in silence. He pecked at the crumbs, using his bunched fingers as a beak, pressed them together, emptied them into a bucket, and then placed dishes and bread on the shelf. When he was through, he knelt on his cape facing the east—he knew for certain where the sun rose—and crossed himself several times before lying down to sleep.

The old man did not kneel before God. Rather, it suited him to go on with his prayers in the position in which he found himself after he had knelt to make his bed. If his bed had already been made up, he would probably have crossed himself standing, for he never thought of God as a power before whom one should kneel. The shrine of Saint Basil of Ostrog was something else; that saint had the power to shake and crush. But before God, no. God does not require of man that he should kneel before him. God

has nothing earthly about him. He is merciful and understanding. Man is not his slave, but his creation.

And there was no sign of change in the old man's relation to God. That showed, Miloš concluded, that the relationship to God was still part of that existence, that unaltered day-to-day existence, in addition to which, and in spite of which, a new sensation was being born—living with death.

If the other two had kept count, they would have found that on this night the old man crossed himself the same number of times as on previous nights, and no doubt uttered the same prayer. But, instead, they looked on in silence, as usual, taking care not to disturb him in any way.

When the old man had finished praying, he stretched himself out on his cot by the wall. He asked Miloš for a cigarette—an Austrian one, ready-rolled—lit it, took two or three puffs, and frowned; clearly the tobacco was not to his taste. He put out the cigarette, pinching it between his calloused fingers, and, turning his face to the wall, he slowly replied at last to the Captain. "Still, a man must be a man to the end."

It was not clear what Vuk meant by this: ought one to go on working and behaving just as one had up to that moment, or ought one to be brave, dignified, human—or what? Or working and behaving as if nothing at all had happened, as if one had not been sentenced to death—is it this that a man is bound to keep up to the end, is it this that gives him the strength to resist every evil, even death? But would Vuk, unlettered as he was, have been able to explain what he thought?

To Miloš, the old man's words seemed full of meaning. He wanted to ask him, "What is man, what does it mean to be a man to the end?" But he could not bring himself to do it. The old man's back was to the wall, as if he were ready to go to sleep, and Miloš was sure that, whatever the

old man's answer, it would not have given a reply to what was taking place inside himself, inside all of them, since the death sentence.

Perhaps the old man really did know what a man ought to do to the end. But could he, or anyone, know how he might hide himself or save himself from the end that was already taking place within him, unconcealedly, uncontrollably?

5

That night, too, they lay down to rest as they always had. The Captain, being last, turned down the lamp. Each settled himself in his bed, was silent, and shut his eyes.

Miloš fell asleep with dim, disconnected images in his mind. These were a vain attempt to convince himself that he was powerless to alter anything, that there was no point in tormenting himself—what would happen would happen. But even as he slept, he knew that he was sleeping. It was worse than sleeplessness. One Miloš was asleep and another was looking at him, feeling his own death. Death was continually awake. Hard, irremovable, unalterable, it made itself felt in his body, in the way he rested his head on his hand, in the hardness of the bed, and, more particularly, in the pit of his stomach, solid, tense, and hot. And it made itself felt in his dreams. His dreaming was conscious of itself. Every shape, every episode and face that presented itself, said: "I am here only to help you forget, to make things easier for you, but I am not a reality; I am a dream."

Wakened by a sudden trembling of his body, which seemed to be flying for refuge from something, Miloš, uncertain whether he had in fact fallen asleep or into some half-waking state, glanced left and right—he was lying between the others—and then about the room. He wanted to

make out how much time had gone by since he had seemed to fall asleep. But there was no way of knowing, and his two companions appeared to be sleeping, each turned toward his wall. Or were they, like himself, looking at themselves as they slept—awake to death?

Whenever he felt sleepless, Miloš would force himself to call to mind beloved faces, memorable experiences, broken fragments of time. But this night his memories seemed as thin as paper and, above all, alien to him. Whatever he called to mind, the very act of remembrance warned him: "You have called me up only so that you may hide, even for a moment, from That." Miloš did not even notice that he had begun to call his own death by the pronoun "That."

He was in his twenty-fifth year, and it was not in the least to be wondered at that in prison he had been increasingly racked by desire. After retiring, he would think of women, both those with whom he had had intimate relations and those with whom he had wished to have them. In these reveries his mind would shed all that was irrelevant, leaving only the purest essence of memory, the fieriest passion, though of course in the context of some definite incident, imagined or experienced. The actual love scenes took the starkest possible form, calculated to bring them most completely to life. The courtings, the kisses, the tender words, though all directed toward sensual adventure, were in themselves touchingly and infinitely modest, expressing the completest devotion. Passion and tenderness mingled and alternated; they stirred him and soothed him, every night, from one night to the next.

The forms of three different women—the dearest, the most desired, the most alluring—soon crystallized from these dreams, and he deliberately dwelt on them. They were, in fact, the three women who had left the deepest impression on him. And he could force himself to summon

up at will any one of them, or all three, in succession or one with another, and recall or invent adventures with them. Other passions, other encounters were discarded as secondary, incidental, as they had been in reality. Memory and longing, mind and desire, singled out these particular shapes and experiences, both those that had been and those that still might be the sweetest, the most exquisite, and the most perfect. Although very different, these forms and experiences seemed to him to make up one whole—different sides of his own experience, different forms of his desire.

Such experiences robbed him of sleep and exhausted him. Something disagreeable, something fictitious and forced remained with him after them. But while they lasted and engrossed him, they were pleasurable, and could not be denied. He knew that he could always take refuge in them and that they awaited him faithfully every night.

It was true that since the death sentence that, too, had changed. The longing was still there, but it was less passionate. It took a coarser form, with no preliminary tenderesses; the images and the manner of experiencing them were abrupt, stark, almost entirely reduced to the sexual act.

Now fully awake, Miloš made an effort to conjure up the three women and all the pleasures he had experienced with them. And indeed they revealed themselves even more swiftly on this night than on other nights.

6

The first was Jaglika, a girl from his village.

Their love had for long been like the love in beautiful old romantic tales, and Miloš still felt about it in this way.

They had grown up together, following the sheep, picking strawberries, playing. She was two years younger than he, and because their families were on good terms—her people were well-to-do farmers and his were local chieftains—he felt affection for her as for a younger sister.

Then he went to school, and the dust of forgetfulness settled on their childhood love.

He was eighteen when he came back to the village for his summer holidays. He noticed that Jaglika was already a young lady; she had lost her quick childish temper and her charm and had grown more reflective and withdrawn. She looked at him with the unconcealed curiosity and alarm reserved by the village girls for the young men back from school. They liked to meet them on the sly, but had to exercise caution, because this committed the schoolboys to nothing. There was nothing at all unusual in such flirtations. But it was surprising, at first, that this should come from Jaglika, the charming, temperamental little girl. He must have looked at her in much the same way. She later told him of the confusion he had aroused in her between her childhood memories and her new girlish emotions.

Jaglika was beautiful. Everyone knew it, in the village and in the surrounding villages. Her eyes were unforgettable—large, dark, under almost straight eyebrows and heavy eyelashes—and so was her abundant raven-black hair, twined into thick, long plaits to crown her high, smooth forehead. Her nose, too, was exceptionally fine—thin and gently aquiline above a downy lip and a mouth red and firmly carved. Her face, which was fine-boned, her throat, her skin were of dazzling whiteness, and the gentle red on her cheekbones would break into a fiery blaze whenever she was abashed, which was seldom, or angry, which was a good deal more frequent. Her way of walking was as light as a dancer's, and so was her whole carriage—erect,

with slow movements of the head. Her neck and her waist were a joy to the eye, the one long and gently curved, the other slender and high-set. She was above middle height, but long-limbed and strong-jointed. Her feminine lines were pronounced—small but firm breasts and firm yet rounded thighs.

But to Miloš, at first, she did not seem beautiful; still less could he see why the other villagers considered her beauty outstanding. There was, of course, a reason for this: he could not in his own mind identify this girl with the grubby, plump, rather malicious child he had known. In addition, he had by now become used to a different type of beauty—the beauty of townswomen, whose figures were more harmonious, less abrupt or harsh. He thought to himself that perhaps to the villagers she really was beautiful. But as he saw her more often and in a more detached frame of mind, he, too, had to acknowledge her beauty.

She was, in fact, a typical beautiful Montenegrin woman—tall, without being either too full or too lean, dark-haired, with a white skin, all brilliance and purity of coloring, with muscle and bone well rounded. She was composed of contrasts in combination. Each part of her was seen separately, but did not detract or conflict with the others. But she had other features, which refined and individualized her Montenegrin beauty and which stirred all who discovered them: the manner in which she parted her lips, gently and delicately; the flashing brilliance of her eyes and teeth, as swift and dazzling as lightning; and her voice, resonant and soft at the same time. She had a way of slowly wrinkling up her forehead, so that one could almost detect the thought stirring behind it, and a quick, decisive way of plying her nimble fingers when knitting or doing other work.

All these things had always been known to Miloš, but he had never noticed them until he made the discovery of her

beauty. And although previously she had seemed to him to lack feeling, now he uncovered a passionate nature which she, with great effort, managed for the most part to restrain. Now, as soon as he touched her, her face would flame, and her glance would lower in sweet confusion.

Their love began quite by chance, though it had long been ripening unperceived. It happened in midsummer, at a time overflowing with the heat and the intoxicating scent of the mown meadows. Miloš had gone down to the river to fish one hot afternoon. A sudden shower of rain drove him into the wood, where, under a wild cherry tree, he came upon her spinning beside the sheep. She moved over to make room for him in the shelter of the knotted trunk under the thick crown of the tree. He did not know what to say. She was an innocent village girl, and in their childhood they had been like brother and sister.

It began when he snapped her thread, as he used to when they were children. With a scarcely perceptible smile and a vague glance of rebuke, she spun out another. He drew closer to her, as if taking shelter from the rain. She slipped aside. He persisted, and she had nowhere to go except into the rain. "Where are you off to?" he asked, and wanted to add, "Have you forgotten how we used to play, how close we were as children?" But he did not do so, feeling that this was something different.

She moved toward him with her lips parted, her spell-bound eyes fastened on his. He threw his arms around her. Trembling quietly, she did not resist him. Her spinning dropped to the ground; her hands fell clasped in her lap. "You've always been dear to me," broke from him. She answered: "You've forgotten me, but I—you've never been out of my mind."

He already knew a good deal about women—from books, from the tales of others, but most of all from the Belgrade landladies, who had educated him as they had other young

men who had hastened to the schools. Jaglika knew nothing about love. She did not even know how to kiss. She kissed him on the cheeks and eyes, as was the custom in Montenegro.

By the time she learned to kiss him on the lips, the whole summer had gone by. She resisted, fearing that in doing this much she would also give him her soul. But the following summer she awaited him with lips that neither would nor could tear themselves from his.

His position was clear from the start. He made no promises, and she did not expect him to marry her. He kissed and embraced her, he played with her hair and bruised her shoulders and breast, but he never made an attempt to seduce her. This would be dishonorable with the girl he had known as a child, an innocent girl whom he could not marry because of the intellectual and social inequality. Besides, she herself had too much purity and pride to surrender finally to her passion; she trusted him and was sure that he would never do anything that would shame her. And so, with ever greater joy and abandon, she herself devised new ways of making love, luring him on into an insatiable dalliance with her body and losing herself in the hard, stark warmth of his.

Was it love? He did love Jaglika. Why then did he not ford all the streams of love? There were moral objections. Certainly if he acted so, he would marry her. And why not marry her? She was a simple peasant, but what of that? She would refine herself. But their relationship, from the start, had been conceived, not out of need, but out of affection.

For yet a third year he looked forward to his home country and Jaglika. She and his home were inseparably bound: the sudden showers and heat, the mountain breeze at night, the pale-blue sky stretched across the stone peaks, the swift rivers which carry off cares and bring joy, and this sturdy girl, with her welcoming breasts and her vixen's

teeth, proud and pure and passionate, like the mountains, and the springs, and the high noon.

But this time Jaglika did not come hurrying to the familiar places. Miloš was not surprised, but he felt it deeply. During their first encounter she told him, though it was unmistakably plain, that she could no longer resist the final surrender. This feeling had ripened through the winter. Nor could his own cravings be satisfied with casual affairs any longer. A decision had to be taken, and they dared not take a decision. It was his responsibility—he knew well enough—with the girl no longer able to resist. Their playing at passion was now over. But passion itself remained, naked, crude, irresistible. They fled from each other in the last moment of that first meeting.

In the autumn she married into another clan. The proposition came, as was customary, from a good family, and her people gave her to a respectable young man.

He had not seen her since then. He had heard that she had borne children. Yes, of course, she, too, was a woman. He would like to meet her. Would Jaglika try to resist him as a married woman, too? Would he feel any of those moral scruples? No. But she? His passion could not break out and he could not give himself up to a woman who did not of her own free will and with full devotion draw him to her side. Would Jaglika do that? Married women often consummate the loves of their girlhood. Would this be a continuation of their old love?

How important was it really? Still, it would be good to meet Jaglika and know that he was still dear to her. She was still dear to him.

The second woman was Divna.

They were fellow students. She was in the language school. But the lectures and seminars on Serbian literature held by the remarkable Belgrade University professor Jovan Skerlić attracted students from other departments as well; what he set forth was not only knowledge, but also a modern, well-thought-out program of the democratic national struggle.

Divna used to come to these lectures. One day she got up from the bench, and as she tried to tuck her lacy blouse surreptitiously into her skirt, the tips of her breasts stood out sharply. He went up to her at the door—not on that account, and yet perhaps he might not have done it had it not been for that. She, however, approached him, too. And neither then nor now could he decide who had really approached whom, and why.

Divna had been his greatest love.

Now, in prison, she seemed to him even lovelier—lovely memories do occasionally come to one in prison. She was beautiful, though not a beauty. Dark-skinned, full-lipped, she had a tip-tilted nose with rounded nostrils, a full figure, sturdy hips, and heavy thighs and breasts. Her fine-drawn fingers, silkily rumpled at the knuckles, and the dark depth of her eyes had a mysterious, almost oriental quality to them. But her shoulders and her bosom—dazzlingly smooth, with hardly perceptible quivering hollows out of which rose the tenderest curves—distinguished her above all and were always full of life and attraction.

At first they quarreled with each other, not knowing what else to do. And so it went on; every quarrel was a prelude to a new intimacy. She was deliberate and cunning, but without malice, while he was impetuous and, to make matters worse, incurable in turning the most absurd

trifles into absolute moral principles. She smothered his principles in embraces, despite his protests that such momentous questions could not be solved by such methods. She would agree with him, acknowledge her fault, and then ask him to put his arms around her irrespective of anything, including their difference of opinion. They quickly became inseparable—in their walks, for which the nights and the streets were too short, and in their kisses, which quailed only before the night watchmen.

Interwoven with their love, and reinforcing it, was Skerlić's patriotic enthusiasm, which was neither romantic intoxication nor bourgeois calculation, but a realistic and fiery belief that the Yugoslavs would liberate themselves and unite within the same generation—if only they would exert all their strength. Because Miloš understood how devoted Divna was to the national cause, he realized how great his obligation to her was.

Divna was sufficiently emancipated not to demand marriage as the condition of their liaison, but she was too hardheaded to yield without such assurances. She was, after all, the daughter of an old-fashioned provincial merchant. She never gave more than she knew she would get, yet she acted warmheartedly and honorably, and, though they never spoke seriously of marriage, she declared that one must deny nothing to the man one loved.

This was a deeply stirring decision in Divna's life. In spite of her feminist and socialist convictions, she found herself in an impasse. If she were to make any demand on him regarding marriage, he might abandon her. But what would happen later on if she became his mistress without the certainty of marriage? She loved him and forgot everything except that he must be hers.

By the time she wrote to her family seeking permission to become engaged to him, she was already taking delight in being regarded as his possession, his familiar but de-

sired wife. She was reckless in her passion for him. Even when they went to see her family, she kept him almost shamelessly by her side. This was neither jealousy nor selfishness; he had become her whole concern in life. She kept an eternal vigilance—about his shirts, his exams, his health, and his thoughts. When it came to love-making, she was more passive than passionate, though on her guard against sleep or fatigue lest he should be left unsatisfied. That often came between them. Yet it was she whom he loved.

Then the wars came to test their loyalty to their ideals. How painful it was for them, in parting, to tear themselves away while still remaining planted in each other. He went as a volunteer to Macedonia before the first war began. She joined the army as a nurse, and reached the battlefield—the flooded fields in front of Bitolj.

No sooner had they met again in Belgrade—in the little room that was both his and hers—than he was called away to the senseless, merciless bloodletting with the Bulgarians. Once again they met. With uneasy consciences, they were determined to find tranquillity this time in a life together, in their own home and children.

Then another war came, immeasurable in its horror and in its length—the last war for them and for their love. She was left at the Belgrade station, in the smoke and steam, with her handkerchief crumpled in her hand, but tearless, and fearful, as always, that he might have forgotten something, too beside herself to remember that he no longer possessed anything except her and his ideals.

They had written to each other right up to last autumn, up to the withdrawal of the Serbian armies. She remained in trampled Serbia.

Where was she now, with her inquiring, rather sly look, with her snaky fingers forever twined in her tangled hair, with her eternally hunched shoulders? Where was her un-

wearying concern for him, her maddening meticulous watchfulness, her slow, devoted response to passion? In some Hungarian internment camp or under some Bulgarian crag? In the common grave of nameless typhus victims? Or in her own country town, secretly awaiting the liberation, which, if it ever came, would be dark and cheerless without her?

Divna—passion and ideal; companion and wife for a lifetime.

They would never see each other again.

8

And lastly came Zagorka.

It was as if she had not been a person, but an unforgettable night of love, a game of the senses. But she had indeed been an individual.

He had known both her and her husband. When he went fishing, his road often led him to their cottage by the stream.

About ten years ago, when he had started fishing and had discovered the trout stream, she had been brought as a bride from a neighboring village to what was then only a hut and a small field in the middle of uncleared woodland. But her father-in-law had cleared the wood after the expulsion of the Turks. Her husband's heart, even if he were not infirm, was not in the land, but, rather, in carpentry, so he found his employment for the most part in the villages.

The father-in-law died soon after she came, and the care of the property and the as yet unbuilt house fell on Zagorka.

In the course of some ten years, everything was transformed under her skillful hands. She saved out of her hus-

band's earnings and paid day laborers to clear new patches of ground from the village common land. For years the young woman's lonely struggle dragged on—with the shoots bursting forth every spring from the unpulled roots, with the weeds, with the rock darting through the unfertile sandy soil. She weeded and hacked, hacked and weeded, until the new clearing struck the rocky hillside and the banks of the stream, shaping itself into a fair-sized field and a patch of meadow and garden.

Nearby there was a water mill. She quickly grasped that there was room for another mill, since there were always people willing to pay miller's dues so as not to lose time and to have their corn ground properly. By painstaking saving, she managed to get a mill built. The mill brought in income which she used to get extra work done on the land. She channeled off the millstream to the property and planted fruit trees. With a paling around it, the little patch began to burgeon into an orchard.

Lacking as yet the means to build a house, she put up a hut of her own design: long tree trunks were driven into the ground at an angle, and their tops crossed and lashed to a beam. The roof was made of brushwood and bracken, with vents for the smoke, the doorway jambs of beech, and there was even a little window on one side. It looked like a spreading roof lowered to the ground. She filled it with bedding, shelves of crockery, and chests, thus transforming it into a comfortable room. She acquired chickens, a pig, a cow. A human dwelling place was born in the wilderness—a nest among the rocks, a thought out of chaos.

The marvel of it all was that Zagorka, hard as she worked, was never overworked. She did not herself do the heaviest work, but kept the control of everything in her own hands and head. She gave the impression that nothing worried her, not because she did not care, but because she believed basically that intelligence and hard work could

overcome any hardship. It was as if she meant to say: "The man who never rests content with anything can, by well-planned work, improve his life and the lives of those who will come after him."

She gave birth to no more than two children, as if that, too, had been dependent on her prudent planning—a son in the third and a daughter in the eighth year of her marriage. She reared them effortlessly and without much anxiety, pleased simply that they were there and confident that she would make of them sound, good people.

The local priest showed her the alphabet once or twice, and thereafter she taught herself to read and write—slowly and spelling out the letters, but still the only woman in the district to do so. A peasant with it all, she was quick to seize a good thing when she saw it—in chieftains' houses, in the town—and to adapt it to her own circumstances. In her hut there were plates and cups and coffee for fastidious guests. She did not dress entirely in peasant fashion: in summer she wore cotton and linen skirts and blouses; what is more, she owned a pair of high boots, for wear in town and church. She was not ashamed of rusticity, but she accepted other ways of life as well.

Zagorka was known for her shrewdness beyond her own village, but not for her beauty. Even Miloš, who was a keen observer, with literary inclinations, did not grasp her beauty, until their last encounter. Yet she understood beauty. The women of the village knew this, as they know which women are skilled midwives, and they used to bring her their embroideries to look at. She would hold them out at arm's length, with her eyes half closed, or drape them over something and move away. If she did not like one, she would say: "It doesn't look right" or "The colors don't match." And she would go on to trace and find the fault, blending threads and colors. She was equally particular about a song that did not please her—"It doesn't

ring true." She sang beautifully, with a warm voice rather like a man's. Her voice altered tone, hardened or mellowed, in harmony with the thought or words of the song. The villagers loved to make her sing as she bent over the cauldron. Before she did so, she would take off her yellow copper ring with the dark-green stone in it, so that it would not clink against the vessel, and as she stooped over the cauldron, she would harmonize the speed of her stirring with her voice and her song. Everyone would fall silent. She liked best the song about the dragon which flew from the sea to the Danube. Those present firmly believed in the existence of the fiery monster which clove the night sky with a trail of sparks and hurtled down into the mountain lake with a captured maiden under his wing.

There was another thing at which Zagorka was unique. She could invent sprays and scrolls for Easter eggs. First, however, she would sniff the soap given her as a present and taste the food with a little pause for reflection.

She gave her children contrasting names, derived from memories of her own life, as in a song, "Žarko and Blaga," the fiery one and the gentle one.

She noticed every change in the murmuring stream as it passed in front of her hut, and foretold the weather from it. In spring she unfailingly picked the right day on which to make a dash to see her own folk up in the mountains, to gather the golden poplar leaves, which grow so fast and fade faster still and combine all the wholesome scents of the highlands.

All this Miloš could see, and did see, even before, in Zagorka. Later the whole woman stood out in his mind, acquiring a sense and a meaning all her own, and he realized the secret of her beauty.

She was a small woman, with quick, harmonious movements. She was all of a piece, a woman with long, rounded,

finely jointed limbs, a wasp's waist, two rows of smooth, shining teeth, and a red tongue behind pouting lips, a woman who could speak so caressingly, daintily, captivatingly, and yet lose herself in song and flowers, in cleanliness and the improvement of the property. This woman, with her quick fingers, so flexible that they seemed boneless, with her restless green eyes and her swift intelligence, knew how to soothe children, entertain old people, and seduce young men.

And yet there was nothing striking about her. Her face was oval, her complexion sallow, her hair, in a heavy coil above her high, rounded forehead, lusterless. It was hard to guess her age—anywhere from twenty-two to twenty-eight. Wrinkles showed only when she laughed. She moved lightly, with little, rapid steps. This accelerated walk was not disjointed; it was playful. Miloš now marveled that he had not at once noticed this, and also the graceful motion of the hem of her skirt.

It was only Zagorka, skillful at training the cock to jump on her arm when she called, who could entertain a tired and harassed soldier all night long, and in such a way that, even in the dreariness and horror of war, his memory had drunk in this meeting as the fullest joy of which life was capable.

Last autumn Miloš had been transferred to another command. On the way he visited his folk. Late that afternoon he was hurrying to the town to his new duties. He decided to squeeze along the stream, over the rocks, and thereby shorten the journey by a whole hour and avoid nightfall. He knew well every stone, from his fishing days. But the icy November rain, drizzling down in the dark, blocked his passage. The rocks were too slippery to climb, especially in army boots. And night would pin him down among them. Angry, he returned down the stream to the

bridle path. He was late, so he decided to get on and, if the dark and the rain closed in on him, to spend the night in some village.

It was in this way that he met Zagorka again. All muffled up, she was standing at the door of the hut as though expecting him. He remembered that when he had set off up the stream, she had followed him with a long glance. She met him with a smile and a warning that he would have to take it from her, a simple peasant woman, that in this kind of weather and with night coming on it was impossible to cross a range of such cliffs. He smiled, too, and replied benevolently that he also was a peasant, at least so far as familiarity with rocks was concerned, but that he had wanted to hurry on. "The longest way round is the shortest way there," she said.

She invited him to have some brandy, and possibly there was a grain of coffee somewhere. "If you don't mind a sooty hut, that is," she added. He realized the significance of the invitation and the mocking rebuke: I am alone. He had once heard rumors that she gladly passed the time with local chieftains and lads from school. She was not the only one; peasant women would occasionally seek from local notables and sophisticated schoolboys the pleasures that peasant life and peasants were unable to offer.

It occurred to him, as he saw her gazing at him distractedly, that he might stay with her an hour or two, although it was late. Why not? He was a soldier from the front, hungry for everything, to whom much might be allowed. And he felt no obligation to her husband, whom he knew only vaguely.

"Come, sit down," she said, as if she had penetrated his thoughts. "You won't be able to get where you want to go anyway."

He agreed, in order to avoid the offense of seeming to despise her hut. He told her so; but when he entered, she

almost threw her arms around his neck, as if moved by his sudden decision. Even before his eyes had become used to the half-light of the roomy hut—the twilight entered only through the door and the little slit of window—he was pleased by its orderliness and warmth. The hut had a fair-sized stove, a fine and comfortable chair, and a bed with a pillow and clean white sheets.

Zagorka's son was with his grandmother, and her two-year-old daughter, who had the same rounded forehead and greeny-yellow, slightly bulging eyes as her mother, was playing with a tabby kitten on the earthen floor.

He sat down on the chair without taking off his wet overcoat. She offered to dry it for him. No, he did not mean to stay long—but he nevertheless took it off. She lit the stove and set a pot on it. He thought: It'll take a long time to make coffee in that way. But he would wait.

He took the little girl on his knees, while the woman offered him brandy in a slim, square glass. She said nothing, but he felt her sidelong, distracted glance on him. Her face had turned pale, and she was trembling, which communicated itself to him. As he took the glass, he noticed that her hand was shaking, and he deliberately avoided the contact of his fingers with hers.

"Are you having a hard time of it there, at the front?" she asked him at last, pouring a second glass of brandy. He refused it, whereupon she drank to his health, standing opposite him with the bottle and glass. She had a good figure, like a girl's—slight, light, and full of life.

"No, not at all. Why should it be so hard at the front?" He explained. War is war. There was death, destruction, rain, short supplies, lice—the lice were the worst of all.

She drank off the glass, and as she went to the cupboard, she said, quite casually, it seemed to Miloš: "The soldiers complain when they come on leave that the worst hardship is being without women."

He thought of asking her whether she found it hard without her husband, but since the question might lead her to suppose that he was offering himself to console her, he remained silent and went on playing with the little girl.

Zagorka came back with a brass coffee mill, sat down in front of him on a stool, and began grinding. He could not help noticing the hidden energy in her as she bent forward with the coffee mill in her lap, her knees outlined through her gray cotton skirt, her feet, in leather toe caps, drawn back, and her slim ankles and tense legs. He could take her in at a glance, but he did not do so. He let his eyes move from the part in her hair down the thin straight nose and the pronounced groove in her upper lip, the smooth throat and the gentle hollow at its base, to the little valley between her provocatively firm girl's breasts and down to the cramped, indrawn waist and the broad lap between the prominent curves of her thighs.

Certainly she was a fine figure of a woman, he thought once again. How firmly and handily she clasped the coffee mill in her lap as she turned the handle with a slow continuous motion.

Later he could not recall exactly what they had talked about until she served the coffee. But he did remember that his attention became more and more keenly riveted on the details of her body, her movements, her low-pitched laughter, the note of warning in her voice, the inextinguishable light in her eyes. It harmonized, merged into a whole, allured him and left him dazed, although at the same time there grew in him the resolution to leave as soon as possible. At one point he suspected her of purposely dragging out time with the coffee so that night would overtake him and he would have nowhere else to go. But this was clearly not quite so; she did everything slowly and without hurrying, and, besides, she was equally aware that darkness would not stop his going. He knew all the roads.

The tension mounted. She was inviting him, detaining, offering; he was resisting, demurring—and agreeing. When she set the coffee before him on a three-legged stool, a silence settled on them, muffled and agonizing. The woman could not bear it. She went to the door and gazed out, deep in thought. He suddenly felt sorry for her, alone like this in this solitary place among the hills, in the night surging forward from all sides.

She remained there until he had finished his coffee and stood up. She turned at the sound, but made no movement while he put on his greatcoat. Then, while he was buttoning it, she darted quickly in front of him and looked at him with that bewildered sideways glance. She offered him supper, gasping as she went through the list of what was to be had. Quarters of newly killed pork were hanging over the fireplace. Suddenly she cut herself short in the middle of her cataloguing. He thought that she realized that the prospect of a substantial supper would not influence him and that this enumeration was merely an attempt to detain him. But the words had calmed her feelings.

He did not know himself whether he was going or staying. Then he began moving halfheartedly, and, as though in passing, put his arm about her shoulders. It was as if she had been waiting for this movement. Quickly she put her hands on his chest and whispered: "Stop here; it'll do you good." He put his other arm around her waist. She clung close to him, pressing against his greatcoat, which was still wet and warm.

Suddenly, without a word, he stepped back, threw off his coat, sat down, and held out his feet. She understood, and, darting forward, seized one of his boots and pulled it off.

There was really nothing to stop them except the little girl. But the presence of the child, astonished that the stranger should be playing with her mother, offended Zagorka perhaps more than him. She put the child into the

cradle and carried it into a dark corner behind the cupboard.

"Now we're alone," she said. "Nothing between us and Heaven."

"Yes, alone," he agreed, "whether Heaven likes it or not."

Free now of all restraints, she leaped into his lap and began to unbutton his jacket. But before she had finished, he took her in his arms and carried her to the bed. "I've wanted so much for so long . . ." she whispered. Through the haze of her burning breath, he remembered that she had in fact, times without number, invited him with glances, provoked him with words and titters. How could he have failed until now to understand her character and all those warning signs?

To the extent to which he surrendered himself to his passion and hers, he came to understand her. On that night in which she led him to abandon himself wholly to her, herself withholding nothing, he realized what, essentially, she was.

She was, of course, in all outward respects like the other peasant women, one of those who willingly lent themselves to intimacy with local chiefs. But after he had got to know her, he found it impossible to look on her as just an ordinary peasant woman, and still less as light and immoral.

Passion and the experience of passion radiated from her whole being. It was not something separable from her activity in making a better thing of her own life, nor from her feeling for embroidery and singing, for playing with children and animals. Her body was built for the complete enjoyment of love and passion—lively, delicate, hard, and persistent.

She exerted no effort and did not for a moment force him or herself in any way. Her movements were neither abrupt nor violent. She barely moved to draw him to her.

Her trembling approach to him came from within. From within, too, came the questing fingers and lips, the warm but not clammy moisture of her body, the allurements in her glances, and the seduction of her words.

The words most of all. He knew, even as her whispering deluged him with them, that they were false and fulsome. She swore that he had always been dear, the dearest, to her, that she could not imagine how he came to know so delightfully, so expertly, about women, that she had never thought that such joy could be felt with any man, let alone that she should feel it, and that she, a simple peasant woman, condemned to want and beggary, would remember him to her dying day. But words such as these were indispensable; without them the enjoyment would have been, as it were, maimed. And although many of them, if they could be divorced from the actual experience, were coarse and shameless, yet because they harmonized with the moment and themselves made up a given moment, they were intoxicating and even pure and beyond all blame in their tenderness. It seemed to him that she knew they were merely sugared falsehoods, a game of fascination. But he did not object; he even started to talk in the same way himself, and talked and talked, senselessly, inexhaustibly.

She contrived always to say and do what the moment required. Action and speech went together. She stopped at nothing. She led him like a child and yielded herself to him with the simplicity of a young girl. But never for an instant was there any slackening of maternal care for him. She made sure that he was well wrapped in bedclothes, that nothing annoyed him, that nothing was stinted, nothing enforced. And in this way she kept in motion her own desires and his.

All her joy was in giving. Taking was also giving. It was as if, unhappy and lost, she sought protection and refuge in his even more forlorn and lonely body, which was now

her own as well, in the smile which he would hardly guess at, in the word which he would not even grasp, in the pleasure he would attain only if she were to cause it to be there.

Something of the same sort was taking place in him. She said: "How sweet you are. You don't think of yourself." And indeed his joy was at its fullest if he gave joy to her. Just as it could not be considered mere sensuality, so, too, his enjoyment was not exclusively of the body. It was of course bodily enjoyment—deliberate, unconcealed, unashamed—but through their bodies enjoyment became actual and the whole of their beings rejoiced in it. All that was human in them gave itself over to a force that had no significance or sense beyond itself, to utter joy.

They said how wonderful it would be if out of this happiness there were to come a child, their own. These were words like the rest, false and drunken. But they uttered them at the moment when there was need of them—in the moments of longing for a more fruitful union and of sorrow that it would not come to this.

The night was a wave-swept ocean of pleasure, which never for an instant struck and shattered against a sea wall. Even talking of everyday things seemed to bring them closer together. He was astonished to find how close she had become to him in his intoxicating, irrational game.

Toward dawn he began to dress, after the cock had roused him roughly from a limitless oblivion. She begged him not to look at her, and quickly pulled on her clothes. She offered to make him something to eat, but he would eat nothing, although he had had no supper either. He drank a glass of brandy, then another. She drank, too, to his health.

He opened the door, and was amazed at the snow that had fallen overnight. This snow, unexpected, was agreeable. Feeling light and refreshed, he trudged off into the

whiteness. He turned; the small figure of the woman stood leaning with an elbow against the doorpost, against the yellow square of the lamplight.

He heard the invitation "Come again!"

He saw her twice again, in the spring. Her husband was there, and she seemed to be another person. In this lively, wary, pretty little woman he could hardly recall the features of that night. Her personality was lost; except for that one night, it had never existed.

He had gone and had not found her.

He never went again.

9

Most often Miloš daydreamed about Zagorka, about that night. And he could find nothing to add as he went back in memory to see that nothing had been forgotten. This time, too, he could remember every detail. Yet, faultlessly exact as they stood in his memory, these scenes had no power to stir him. He went over them again and again, and, appalled at their leaving him unmoved, he fled from them. He experienced the scenes as if he were another person. His inevitable fate was like some heavy, ice-cold object. He must already be dead, even though he moved, ate, thought, and craved.

Exhausted and horrified by his thoughts, he leaped up in his bed. He turned to the light of the lamp, to a reality that was not real, not his, and for a moment felt almost at ease. But only for a moment. The tide of horror—the idea of the whole world of death as the only real world—began once more to mount, unaccountably, from all his sources of feeling, spiritual, mental, corporal. He did not worry about whether he had awakened the other two, but lit a cigarette. Then, immediately forgetting he had done so, he

propped his head on his fist. The horror was crushing, rending, crumbling him. Observation, experience, feeling were draining away to extinction through unknown channels. Something was burning him. Yes, it had already come to that! He looked; it was the cigarette, which had burned down and was singeing his fingers.

It was no help to him that he knew all that science knew about death, that he had seen so many deaths, that he had read about hanging. He had by chance read a German book about death penalties. The Germans have everything beautifully taped, even that. There was an exposition in the book of medical inquests, especially in cases of hanging, and recollections of men who had survived being hanged. Even if the execution has not been professionally carried out, unconsciousness ensues in a few seconds, to the accompaniment of agreeable sensations like hearing music and thoughts of green fields.

But the terror was not in the actual pain—it was not painful to die—but in the inevitability of it, in the knowledge that it would happen at such and such a moment, absolutely, and in the endless waiting for that moment.

Man was the only being aware of the inevitability of death. Probably for that very reason every joy except the joy of the creation of life was overshadowed by it. Therefore no human joy was ever absolute. But kindly Nature seemed to have taken account of this: the consciousness of death did not torment man, because he did not know when it would happen. Even in war there is hope for survival. Conscious of death, man lives as if he might never die. Only man can force on man the horror of death, by specifically ordaining death in legal judgments.

Meditation on death did not stir or shake a man—it was as though he were thinking about anything else. What is more, there was a sort of self-forgetfulness in it, since the subject of his meditation was death in general, rather than

his own. His own death, however, was always there, and oppressing and corroding him by its own force, irrespective of whether he thought about it or were trying to picture it in his mind.

Miloš continued his meditation. After the notification there was no hope. He knew now the hour of his death—the day after tomorrow, on Monday morning. Monday was market day. A bandit and an army deserter had been executed on market day, at about ten o'clock, so that a lot of people would be present.

It was now the night between Saturday and Sunday, and by Monday midday he would no longer be alive. So soon; and yet so inconceivably far away.

He remembered that Dostoevsky, too, who had likewise been sentenced to death, spoke of the way in which time dragged for men condemned. He was unable to recall Dostoevsky's remarks exactly, but they were to the effect that if the time between the prisoner's knowing when he is to die and the actual execution splits into smaller and smaller fragments—and it is the prisoner who splits it in this way—then each of these diminishing fragments appears to him to be increasingly longer and more fearful in proportion as he draws nearer to death. And the last moment of all, when the prisoner hears the blade of the guillotine moving toward his neck, must be of endless duration because his terror is measureless.

Now I am measuring out this fearful, protracted, ever-lengthening time, Miloš thought. I am measuring it in this meditation on death, noticing how it flows from thought to thought. And so it will be up to the last moment, happen what may. I can do nothing to shorten it, and it will go on getting longer and longer, more and more fearful.

And that moment!

From the instant when they have moved the plank from beneath my feet until the rope tightens under my weight,

that moment, with its endless horror, will be graven forever and ever on my whole being. So I shall die with that moment in my memory: that moment will last into eternity; yes, for me it will last into eternity, as long as my own life.

In the knowledge when death will come, in the eternity of that last moment, lies the whole horror, my burden of sorrow and that of every man condemned to die.

He felt it would be easier for him if his fellow sufferers were awake. But they were not asleep either. They were, like him, sunk in a sort of semiconsciousness that resembled sleep. Like him, they were brooding in silence and as if they were sleeping.

Old Vuk was thinking of his granddaughter Milica—the child of his youngest son, killed by the Albanians in Metohija. Milica's mother had remarried, but Vuk would not let his granddaughter go; he wanted to bring her up himself. Often in prison he would talk as though to the little girl and play games with her, ready to cry or laugh over his absurdities. This had amused his companions, and they would encourage him to play with her in his imagination. He would teach her words and songs and tell her stories in which he was sometimes a bird, sometimes a tree or a man, a dragon or a fairy. He could make up excellent stories, even here in prison. But tonight he could think of nothing new. He merely repeated all he had told her so many times before.

His little granddaughter was with relatives; she would come to no harm. She was missing him as he missed her. He delighted her with his nonsense, and he loved her wonder at each new thing, the softness of her tiny hands about his neck, her mischievous eyes. In those first days, the separation from her had weighed heavily upon him. It had been like the death of someone dear to him. He had known this unforgettable pain since his earliest youth; his

brothers had lost their lives, and friends, fellow clansmen, and his own children and grandchildren had died. But the parting from his little granddaughter had struck him most heavily of all, because she was alive and came to his mind offering joy and leaving only grief.

Hale as he was, the old man was aware that little of life remained to him. In bringing up Milica, he transferred himself to her, prolonged his life in hers. Now she would be deprived of the tenderness and the instruction he gave her. He could remember it all. Once again he tickled her on the throat with his pointed beard, and she laughed and struggled against him. But never again would she gladden or grieve him. It would all die here in the darkness, under the gallows. It was no use remembering songs and caresses.

As he tried to fall asleep, he knew that he would not continue to live in his granddaughter. He would cease to live in any form; even Milica would perish on the gallows. Life seemed too short, even to him, an old man. It was shameful to think so at his age!

He did not know exactly how old he was—about seventy-five. He remembered clearly the death of Prince-Bishop Rade. Rovci had overflowed with lamentations and songs of mourning, and in spite of the cold and heavy rains the chieftains had gone to Cetinje to mourn for their unhappy ruler. When, later on, Omer Pasha had struck at Montenegro, Vuk was in his boyhood. He had taken refuge at his uncle's, in the Nikšić district, and escaped into the mountains with the cattle. And when Vukalović had raised a revolt in Hercegovina, Vuk, then a young man, went to fight the Turks.

He remembered his life in terms of wars, dangers, and disasters. Ill fortune had never left him. He had been born in an evil hour, in an ill-starred land, and in an evil hour he was now to die.

He went over his whole life. The further off the mem-

ories in his childhood, the clearer they were. His life had passed so swiftly, and yet there was as much to recall as if he had lived from time immemorial. And it was as if in life there had been neither good nor evil. Perhaps some good was, after all, bound to come. Perhaps with Milica. His thoughts always came back to her, though each time she somehow seemed more distant to him. It was as if she were not the one he had remembered up till now, but someone else, who, if she gave any heed to the matter, did so in order not to distress him before his death.

His heart was heavy—because his own life was passing into nothingness, because of Miliča. And he was ashamed; he was afraid. He who had come through so many calamities and had been in so many fights was like this! Still, he could not help being like this, and the feeling of shame was not genuine either. He seemed to feel indifferent, whether afraid or not afraid, ashamed or not ashamed, with Milica or without her. She would go on living without him.

Death is like that; it gives no rest to the spirit until it tears it out.

Unable to sleep, the old man sat up. The young man was awake, too, sitting and smoking. He felt sorry for Miloš, and yet did not. It was like everything else.

"God did not make man aright," he said suddenly. The older man is, the more reluctant he is to die. And after a little reflection he added: "Man must have committed some grievous sin before God sent him to earth."

Miloš did not react. The old man felt ashamed of what he had said in the presence of the young man, who had only just begun to live. "Man is built that way," Vuk went on, though not by way of apologizing, "and he does not grudge this life for someone who is dear to him or for some good cause. God did in a way also make man aright."

Miloš now seemed to hear and even understand him. He smiled and offered Vuk a cigarette.

Captain Draško stood up.

His companions at once noticed in him not so much fatigue as a certain wild distraction. His eyes were wider open than usual and protruded staringly. His thick, long mustaches, which, on rising, he never failed to twist and brush upward with care, hung drooping and neglected. He glanced at Miloš and Vuk as if hardly recognizing them, then suddenly walked across the room. When he got to the door, he turned, noticed the pitcher of water, filled the blue glazed mug so quickly and impatiently that the water spilled over its edges, and drank it as if he were dying of thirst. The water poured from the corners of his mouth and drenched his mustaches. He banged the mug and the pitcher angrily against the table, as if they had done him some wrong. Then, standing in the middle of the room with his feet apart and raising his fists in the air, he began shouting: "You're scared, Captain. Scared. You, a Montenegrin officer, a man of good family, decorations, a hero of the battlefield, yet when that moment comes . . ." He did not finish. Perhaps he failed to find the right words, or perhaps it had just entered his head that this was not fear and cowardice, but something else, inconceivable.

He was indeed the kind of man who would not have wavered for an instant if he had had to march with bared breast against guns or bayonets. But here it was no longer a question of cowardice or of heroism, of honor or of shame, but of something unknown and incomprehensible.

Ashamed and sobered by his own words, the Captain laughed cheerlessly and sat down beside the other two. He wiped his finely shaped forehead, dried his mustaches, and told them how he had lain in a state of agitation. It had seemed to him that he had fallen asleep, but differently, as if he were not really asleep, and he was aware of everything going on and of everything that would happen.

Until tonight, his wife and son had never left his

thoughts. He had felt sorry for his wife: he was leaving her young and alone. She had never had any kind of a life with him, torn from home as he had been by wars and military service. He could not bear the thought of her unhappiness, though he knew her to be brave and stout in resistance to every misfortune. But he had been comforted by the thought that she still had their eight-year-old son, Rade—a happiness he and his wife had never shared together, a living reminder of him and of his name.

And now, tonight, he found he had no thought for either.

"You won't believe me," he now concluded, "but it's as if it were all the same to me whether I die a hero's death or what sort of name I leave behind me."

A long and painful silence followed. Each of them knew what was going on in the mind of the others. It was as if they stood stark naked, inside and outside, before each other.

It was all so clear that Miloš and the old man had no need to set out their own experiences. Nevertheless, Vuk, perhaps to show solidarity with Draško, gave a short account of his own restlessness. And Miloš said: "It's as if everything had died, except our own deaths."

There was nothing any more with which they could console or hearten themselves; and they felt no need of it.

10

And yet they had to, they wanted to, cut short what remained of the night.

"How would it be, now that we're wide awake, if Miloš were to recite us some ballads," the old man began.

He himself knew a great many folk ballads, especially

the epic ones. He could relate them in the proper sequence, he could even direct the man chanting them to the *gusle*, but he could not recite them himself. A ballad has to be told in the manner in which the folk composed it and embellished it. A ballad cannot be recited like something one has seen with one's own eyes.

Miloš knew many ballads by heart. He could memorize poetry without difficulty. Besides, there are certain elusive rules about folk ballads which enable a person familiar with their tone and spirit to commit them to memory easily. Verses, scenes, images enter the mind and are held there of their own accord once one is acquainted with the technique of constructing a ballad. He did not, of course, remember every actual line or image, but he remembered enough to piece together lines or images like them. And the Captain knew portions of ballads, especially those describing heroes and heroic deeds.

By pooling what they remembered, and with time enough to spare, the three of them were able to entertain themselves, with Miloš reciting, the old man reminding him if he skipped anything, and the Captain supplying lines from time to time.

The folk ballads stirred Miloš more than any other form of art. He was sure he had accompanied his first words with singing: his words had been poems. The first conscious thoughts and emotions of his childhood had been linked with these creations of the popular mind which had come down to him, purified, but still alive, from the remote and unknown past. For him, they combined in one whole the visions, the language, and the mind of the people, who, as it were, would not have existed if it were not for these poems. They were not only poetry, but a way of thinking and looking. They were life, thought, feeling, linked with the life of everyday, yet washed clean of it.

For these reasons, they were, if not more exalted, then more readily to be understood than any other form of beauty.

For the Captain, the ballads were, above all, a statement of history, and were, consequently, for instruction and inspiration, except that in the ballads everything was exaggerated in order to be more beautiful and more interesting. Their beauty lay in their wisdom and their truthfulness. Whenever he recited something from a ballad, he did so in such a way as to make the people and the events in it more real and lifelike. He also made use of a great many expressions, sayings, and images from the ballads, and he did so effortlessly, since people's everyday speech was full of them.

To Vuk, the ballads were reality itself, the reality by which people live and think, by which they suffer and fight. It was not of the least importance to him whether the incidents in them really took place, although he maintained they did. Fairies, dragons, winged horses, swords with eyes, and heroes with three hearts all existed for him, otherwise they would never have been celebrated in ballads. They were no less real to him than the reality he knew and in which he led his own life.

In other ways, too, Vuk thought of the world in his own fashion. Everything—animals, plants, and even inanimate things—had life, and conversed and harmonized with other things, though a man may not directly perceive it with his eyes. No, of course his cattle did not talk, nor did a hornbeam complain when he felled it or a snake turn into a witch when he battered it on the head. Nevertheless, he believed all this could happen. He did not claim that he had wrestled with devils and werewolves, but he believed in them, just as, on proofs received from his forefathers, he knew exactly in which rocks there were evil spirits and which of these appeared on which nights, where the

witches held their gatherings, which individual changed into a vampire, and which person in the clan was a changeling and what his powers were. These things lay in ambush for a man, or aided him according to whether he did or did not win their support by certain definite actions. Man was forever in contact with secret, incomprehensible forces, as he was with the forces he sees daily. The first are as real as the second, although a man is capable of distinguishing between them and holding his ground.

The Captain, too, believed in God, devils, and saints, as forces beyond our comprehension which have given us life and in accordance with whose powers and decrees man must conduct himself. But to Vuk none of this was divorced from man. He even believed that God and his saints and angels were as close to a man as some of his own relations. He believed that his prayers went straight to God's ears, that God felt grief and anger at heinous sin, and that he sent saints and angels as officers and judges to supervise and order the world. He would never have asked himself whether the monks were right in changing the stockings of Saint Basil of Ostrog every morning: the Saint, in supervising good and evil, goes his rounds at night. The pictures of saints and archangels painted on the walls of the monastery at Morača did not speak, for mortals could not have understood them, but they had the power to hear and even to see the thoughts of men. This monastery was as close to Vuk as his own home, but more beautiful and sacred—a place where one met God. He knew that the sacred place had been built by Vukan, of the House of Nemanja, some five hundred years ago. But in his own mind the incidents connected with the laying of its foundations, preserved in folk tales, had the life and directness of something that happened yesterday, and he related them as if he had personally taken part in them.

Vuk did not draw comparisons between the saints ac-

cording to their power and importance; such sinful thoughts never entered his mind. But there was one saint—Basil of Ostrog—toward whom his attitude was markedly not only one of general awe and respect—he stood up whenever he mentioned his name—but also one of special regard for the wonder-worker who had the most direct influence on the lives of the people of his region—Montenegrins and Hercegovinians, and Moslems as well as Christians.

Miloš had discovered some of the many influences that governed Vuk's attitude toward this saint. Basil of Ostrog was the one purely Montenegrin saint; his place of residence was among the steep crags of Ostrog. He performed miracles all about him, or so the stories went, and was imbued, limitlessly, with all those mysterious powers in which the people believed: he healed from every sickness, could be addressed in prayer at all times and on every subject, was helpful before action of any kind and in the face of any apparition, and was stern and merciless in retribution. He never forgave or forgot, but stripped evil bare and punished it. He had appeared at the time of the cruelest slavery under the Turks, at the beginning of the seventeenth century, to a little goatherd on a remote, inaccessible rock high above the roads and plains, far from the infidel's arm. His appearance was associated in the minds of the starved and illiterate people with the beginning of the struggle for freedom from the Turks. Belief in the Saint's powers and pilgrimages to his shrine in the cave of the rock grew. At the time of the great Turkish invasions, the Montenegrins either fled with his relics or barricaded themselves in the shrine, defending and protecting both the relics and freedom.

The Saint represented to Vuk the transcendental, mysterious side of Montenegrin life and history, the past and hope, the struggle and belief of heroic, suffering, unconquerable Montenegro.

There was something of this, too, in his attitude toward the ballads—a more complete and more definite reality than the one that can be observed. This was his life, lived in community with the nation, with the people who spoke his language and shared his destiny. A man was as bound to sing and compose and rhyme as he was to plow and scythe, to eat and sleep.

Hardened as he was to the evils around him, Vuk easily burst into tears when Miloš recounted the disaster at Kosovo and the sufferings of the heroes. He followed the story with enthusiasm and hailed every heroic deed and clever stratagem, as well as the man who executed them. It was irrelevant whether he was hearing a ballad for the first time or knew it well; he was always stirred to emotion in the same way and by the same passages.

The ballad of the three prisoners from three different Montenegrin clans in the dungeon of the Vizier of Scutari invariably moved him to tears at one and the same point: one of the prisoners, his fellow clansman and ancestor Vuksan Bulatov, having succeeded in fleeing, beholds in the distance the peak of a Montenegrin mountain and swears that he will build a church on it if he escapes the Turkish swords. That church, Vuk would always add, still stands today on the bare stony height.

Grieving over the tragedies and rejoicing over the victories in the ballads, Vuk seemed to grieve and rejoice over himself, that self that was a man with other men, a Serb among Serbs.

But tonight the recitation of ballads did not raise their spirits, though Miloš tried some that express contempt of death and torment. The old man did not once shed a tear, and the Captain neglected to point the morals. However, it did shorten the night. There was some comfort in the knowledge that there had been victims among their people before, and in this same prison, and there would be after-

ward, countless hosts of them, shrouded invisibly in the darkness of the past and in the mists of the future. The Captain found words for this, after the ballad in which the father counsels his son to resist the tortures of the Turks only in order that they might not betray anybody. "We are not the first or the last," he said, "nor has the world been reduced to us three." And the old man said: "Somehow, with a ballad it's as if I weren't alone."

Miloš thought: Yes, there have been and there will be other victims, and we are no doubt only units in the long-drawn-out, age-old suffering of our nation and of the human race and its roll of martyrs. But this martyrdom has to be suffered by each one of us personally—by me, for whom no one and nothing can be a replacement or a substitute. And although we are victims like those in the past, and will add ourselves to them just as those to come will add themselves to us, we feel no grandeur or exaltation; we do not feel like martyrs, nor do we feel bound in unity with anybody else, not even each other. It is I who will die, who knows when I will die. I, I, I!

Reciting ballads they greeted the morning, which even the early riser Vuk hardly noticed until the Captain was led away to meet his family.

11

Captain Draško returned later than they had expected. He said that it was about ten o'clock; the time on the wall clock in Ungri's office, from which he had just come, was engraved on his memory. There were differences now in his appearance and bearing. A big man, bow-chested, stoutly built, with hefty fists and a bull neck, and with his cap pushed up above a high, rather narrow forehead, he paced almost angrily about the room—this had never been

his custom before—so that the floor boards creaked under his heavy footsteps. He forgot about brushing up his mustaches, and from time to time he stopped and looked at his companions as if they, too, had done him some wrong. He had been exhausted from lack of sleep when he had left them, and now he was spoiling for a fight, though agitated and shattered. He seemed to be another man, neither the man he had been before the sentence—sociable and reasonable, even if oversensitive on the point of honor and even impatient when Montenegro and its ruler were called in question—nor yet the man he had been after the death sentence—lost and listless.

He had indeed been to meet his wife and son; that much he told them after he had calmed down a little. But this meeting had brought him no joy at all. The tears that his wife and son had poured forth at every word and gesture, especially at the beginning, had not only drowned any gladness he might have felt at the meeting, but had revealed to Draško that he really did not welcome it. He, too, had burst into tears, and had wept without restraint. And to his surprise he had not felt in the least ashamed before Ungri and the two warders. It was his last farewell to his dearest ones, and he felt it was his last salute to his own life.

It was astonishing that he had almost nothing to say to his wife. His few words of advice about the property, the house, and his son, his greetings to the family and the village, were not only rapidly and briefly uttered, but no longer had for him the importance he had attributed to them yesterday, before the death sentence. He had nothing to say to his son either; his few tender, encouraging words seemed to him to have been spoken empty and forlornly to himself.

His wife, too, appeared to have nothing to say to him. This came as a still more forcible confirmation of what his

own speechlessness had told him: any kind of message was superfluous, senseless, since, even if life still had to be carried on, he, Draško, no longer had any part in it. People who leave bequests are people who are still alive and have obligations toward life; but he, in fact, was already hanging on the gallows. No one owed him anything any more, and he had settled all his debts.

And so both he and his wife soon found themselves wordless, without feeling, almost without emotion. Only the child, possibly because he had not grasped the finality of his father's death, continued to cling to him with moving embraces and words.

Then his wife began to tell him in a roundabout way, using expressions whose real import only people very close to each other, especially husband and wife, would catch but which might be freely exchanged between a prisoner and a visitor, that an order had gone out to the whole district that tomorrow at eight o'clock all adults, men and women, were to be in town in order to attend the execution. The gallows had already been erected on a little hill nearby. The internment of Montenegrins, officers and men, was now almost complete, although quite a number of people had gone into hiding. In the villages there was practically nobody to be seen but women and old men. The nation was disarmed and dispirited. But everyone was counting on the three of them, and especially on him, the Captain, to acquit themselves like heroes. It was at that point that Ungri intervened, almost casually, with a warning that they should confine themselves to family matters, but without any indication that he had completely understood what the woman had been saying.

She went on to say, in a still more involved fashion, that she would be coming herself the following day, on that morning that would be a black day to her forever after, to share his agonies with him, but she would not bring the

boy with her. She then reverted to the expectation that they would bear themselves like brave men. She, too, expected that. Let the world know whose wife she was, and let their son, Rade, remember his father with pride.

It was a message from a world and a life to which Draško no longer belonged, but for which his death was of almost historic importance. He promised her many times over that he would conduct himself bravely and that they were not afraid. But even as he said it, he felt clearly that he was not saying what lay on his heart.

Yet his assurance that they were not afraid was not inexact. Whatever was oppressing him, and all three of them, could not be called fear, at least not the kind of fear they had known hitherto. There was nothing to put them in fear of their lives and that could be warded off, since their lives were already forfeit. Consequently, to bear himself like a hero lost all meaning or point. It lost its significance not for Draško, the Montenegrin, the Captain, but for that other Draško who was, so to speak, already hanging on the gallows and who was known only to himself. He was completely certain not only that he would have sufficient strength, but that it would not require the least effort on his part to lift up his head beneath the gallows and shout for Montenegro and liberty. But anything of that sort had hardly any connection with his personality, with the one who was to die and who was already hanging at the rope's end. So talking about it was for him an unnecessary and unspeakably wearisome effort.

And now, as he recounted to his friends how he had assured his wife that he would act like a hero, he expressed what he had actually thought and felt at that moment: "Agony on agony, and fresh agony on top of that."

His wife had understood only too well what he was thinking and feeling, but to her, clearly, what was important—hardly less so than if he were to return to her alive

tomorrow—was to impress on him how bravely he must bear himself for all the world to see. It had been more to avoid causing her distress than because he had realized the significance of his promise to behave courageously at the gallows' foot that he had begun to reassure her, of course in cryptic language, that neither she nor the others need worry, that he fully realized how important it was, and that a hero's death was a thousand times better than a life of shame. He had made use of swelling clichés and sweeping gestures, till he was quite carried away. But his real frame of mind, at bottom, remained unaltered.

In spurring him on, his wife had thrown in the words "Wise old folk have said that it is easier to die bravely." That meant, he felt, that people were urging the three of them to play the hero for their sakes as well. His wife was transmitting the age-old experience of a nation that had been hacked, burned, impaled, and hung in chains.

As he was preparing to tell her that he and his companions, irrespective of these demands from outside, would demonstrate tomorrow the fearlessness of the Montenegrin spirit, Ungri intervened, thus showing that he had understood what they were talking about: "If you have any further family matters to discuss, good. If not, say good-by."

Draško kissed his wife, as he had never kissed anyone before, a sister, a mother, or any other woman, let alone a woman with whom he had spent many happy hours. They did not weep; it was one single, continuous fierce embrace, which lasted only a short while because they knew that they had to part.

But the boy would not, could not, be parted from his father. He hung about his father's neck, sobbing on the shoulder broad enough to carry all his sorrows. "What shall I do without you, Daddy?" Draško's eyes filled with tears. He was sorry for the boy, whose puppyish, dark-

skinned little body, so like his mother's, was shattered by the irrevocable loss of his first great conscious love.

Since his return from the war, with nothing much to do in the village, Draško had spent most of his time with his son. The boy grew more attached to his father than to his mother. His father never beat him and treated him as an equal in all they did together, introducing him to a boundless, unknown world. Without his father, the child saw this world as empty, dreary, frightening.

Draško was strangely able to hold back his tears, but his pain at his son's unhappiness, so sharp that he lost sight and almost consciousness, quite overshadowed his own agony, for the first time since the death sentence.

Ungri showed understanding and did not insist on their separating until Draško himself put the child from him, after the boy, worn out by grief and tears, had grown calmer.

His wife led the child away. Then it was her tears that were flowing, from glazed eyes, down a face that had turned to stone. Draško called out to his son, perhaps to his wife as well, before the door closed behind them: "Don't forget me! I won't forget you. Good-by! Good-by!"

Though deeply shaken, the Captain was also refreshed. He felt relieved, not just as one usually is by tears which wash away pain, but as if he had checked himself from drowning in a fathomless, utter loneliness, in a flood of anguish and despair. Until now he had never had such a feeling, although he had thought of almost nothing else but his child and his wife. But perhaps that small body, full of life, quivering with sobs on his shoulder, had made his own life feel unquenched. Yes, he would have come to life again if they did not hang him: life would return with a force and beauty never known before. Now things were different: it gladdened a man's heart to leave something

living behind him, he told his companions, clearly moved at the memory of his farewell to his son and his wife.

But after the parting with them, the Captain had an encounter with Ungri which he had not anticipated.

12

Captain Draško and Political Commissary Ungri were left alone in the office.

Having waited long enough for the Captain to recover from the farewell to his wife and son, Ungri began trying to persuade him to repent before the people on the following day. Or, rather, not exactly to repent in so many words—or so the Captain understood—but, as a man who loved his country and his nation, who had fought for both and had finally laid down his life for them with an honorable, though reckless, intention—Ungri allowed that the intention had been honorable—he might say a few words of good sense to the people to prevent their rising uselessly against the occupying power and thereby calling down on themselves burnings, hangings, and persecutions.

The fortunes of war, Ungri explained, had brought victory to the Imperial and Royal Armed Forces, and, in consequence, these now exercised a lawful authority over Montenegro. He realized that the Montenegrins could not look on this authority in the same way as they did on their own. Nevertheless, it was now the sole and lawful authority; on this point they must be absolutely clear, and in fact everyone was except for a few Serbian agents and a few leading men whom authority had allowed to slip through its fingers. Further, the Austrian forces were strong enough to crush any resistance. What purpose had been served by that bullet fired by Brigadier Vešović, of which one could not even say that there had been any-

thing in the least heroic about it? A few thousand Montenegrins had been driven into internment camps, and hardly more than a few score had escaped to the woods; and even these units were being hunted down one by one and were inactive. Indeed, activity was impossible for them, since each attack of theirs was repaid a hundredfold by the army in burnings and the taking of hostages. In view of this, it was the Captain's duty—his duty in honor and conscience even—to address the people in sober terms in his last hour and instruct them to behave reasonably.

Ungri was not lying. The Captain could deduce that the situation was like this from what his wife had told him, and from time to time words and sounds in the prison yard had reached them, from which it was sometimes possible to gather what was going on outside. Furthermore, one of the prisoners, a fellow clansman of Vuk, managed covertly, as he walked up and down under their window, ostensibly humming folk ballads, to convey in his verses, as if it were part of a folk song, what was taking place outside, never forgetting to add words of encouragement.

The Captain either did not notice or did not attribute any significance to the fact that, for the better realization of his plan, Ungri had chosen the very moment when the Captain would be shaken by his parting from his family and anxious to do whatever he could for them. But to Miloš it was clear, and as the Captain was telling his story he remembered having read in that German book on capital punishment that men condemned to death were inclined to show repentance, especially if it were pointed out to them—and to convince them of this was relatively easy, given the frame of mind they were in—that by confessing they were fulfilling a noble duty, the last that remained to them as mortal men. Thieves had from the scaffold adjured those present to take warning from their example, and heretics had thanked their judges from the

pyre for having purged them of their sins by fire and returned them to the true faith. The book had explained this inclination on the part of condemned men by their spiritual exhaustion and by the fact that even the lowest malefactor does not cease to be a man; and science leaves unbroken at least some thread binding the criminal to society, to his family, and to the human race. That is understandable: man is a social being—a political animal, as Aristotle says—and does not cease to be one even when he turns against society, since his community does not depend on him but is one of the modes of his existence, independent of his will. Judges and policemen usually have no notion of the philosophical side of this question, but know from experience how to seize hold of the solid thread that most firmly links the prisoner to the world outside. This is not, after all, hard, since they have the prisoner in their charge every day and hear his wishes and complaints and can consequently lead him on to the declarations they want.

Ungri had appealed first of all to the Captain's Montenegrin patriotism, to his unreserved love of his country and its people.

Although the Captain had realized the reasonableness of Ungri's advances, in many respects he began to resist them, without a thought, even, of his wife's admonitions as to what the dispirited people expected of him and of the three of them. There was one special reason for this resistance—the same that made tomorrow's demonstration seem a useless piece of heroics and even superfluous: he felt a desire, the only desire he did feel in the ghastly desolation that had come over him since the death sentence, to die as peacefully as possible. He was not referring to his own conscience, which was at peace, but to the desire for the least possible noise or movement on his own part. What Ungri wanted from him meant that he would have to exert himself, to plan, to speak, to move. As if sensing this,

Ungri showed some understanding of this difficulty and proposed that they should compose together—but in fact he meant to do it by himself—the speech the Captain would merely read. The very fact that Ungri did not demand any effort on his part, either now or tomorrow, made his arguments seem more persuasive, and even acceptable.

It was, of course, immediately clear to the Captain that Ungri was making his proposals chiefly because the Austrian Army wanted peace and not at all because he cared whether the Captain did or did not in his last hour express his love and confidence in his people. But in spite of this, some of Ungri's arguments had a certain point: for it was hardly in the interest of the people, disarmed, disunited, oppressed by a foreign army as they were, and at a time of victory for the Central Powers, to clash with the occupying power. Unpremeditated, individual clashes—and they could not be otherwise at this time—might do more harm than good, by affording the enemy the chance to nip resistance in the bud. Was not premature resistance worse than honorable and stubborn endurance? Who could take upon his conscience the hopeless suffering of so many people? Why should the Kolašin region and his own, Draško's, captaincy be the first to suffer a blow, since even without this they had undergone more misery than anyone else in the war?

Ungri's proposals looked, strangely enough, still more attractive from the Captain's personal point of view. To him it was by now almost a matter of indifference, not only by what manner of death he was dispatched—hanged, shot, torn to pieces—but almost how he conducted himself in the face of it. He felt no hatred against Ungri, not even against Austria, and he was perfectly ready to negotiate for the sake of his own peace of mind and a peaceful death.

However, there was still an insuperable argument that

drove the Captain to resist even before Ungri had opened his mouth. As a Montenegrin, the Captain had insisted to himself and to his companions in prison, he could not and would not act on the wishes of a foreign authority in anything that concerned Montenegro and Montenegrins. Even though he felt them at this time to be something separate from himself, they were also something of which he had no right to dispose, not even of that part of them which lived in himself. Montenegro and the Serb Idea were now something outside his own personality. Nevertheless, in some strange way they were now more firmly set than ever before; they had, as it were, turned to stone and had become immutable whatever might befall, quite irrespective of any attitude that he might adopt toward them. For that reason, to dispose of them was both unnatural and impossible; it was as if Ungri had demanded of him that the sun rise in the west. If he were to renounce them or do anything to their disadvantage, he could only dishonor himself, not the self to be executed tomorrow, but the self who would live on in the memory of the nation, and in his son, whereas he could not harm Montenegro at all. In the face of this consideration, all Ungri's arguments, good and bad, collapsed; the Captain had no wish even to assess them. In defining this attitude he did not so much as recall his wife's exhortations. The Captain, simply because he was the kind of man he was, without a great deal of thought or subtle reasoning, rejected the shameful Austrian proposals.

Ungri was not in the least surprised at this. Mouthing his mustache with his lower lip and smoothing his pale yellowish forehead and his sparse hair, he was exceptionally calm and unruffled, even amiable. He slipped in his arguments unobtrusively and always at a moment when the Captain seemed to hesitate or was obviously thinking of his real situation. But after his designs had foundered on Draško's obduracy, he said with an outward calm, but

actually with a rage he could scarcely control: "In that case, Captain Draško, sir" (these were the words he used, although he had never hitherto called him either Captain or Sir), "in that case, I must inform you that your wife and son will be interned, as is done with the families of the most dangerous rebels." And the Captain should bear in mind that, in spite of the humane efforts of the Austrian authorities with regard to conditions in the camps—hunger, sickness, and so forth—a child, particularly a child of frail constitution, might succumb. Apart from this, the child would be separated from his mother and consigned to an orphanage with children of various nationalities. Austria did not Germanize anybody—the languages and customs of other races were respected there—but wartime conditions were such that there were no special camps for Serb children without their parents. In a case such as this, internment was natural and lawful; it was a question of a family which was fomenting the spirit of rebellion, and the responsibility, before God, the state, and humanity, fell entirely on the Captain and his senseless lack of consideration. His wife and child had, in fact, already been arrested and were awaiting the decision of the Captain.

Captain Draško was so appalled that he forgot what was awaiting him the following day. They were threatening him with the extinction of his son, his own other existence. Yes, that would be his complete extinction, whether they killed his son by starvation or denationalized him. One thought knotted itself in Draško's mind: If he were to shout with all his heart, no matter what, the child would perish; but if he gave way to argument and talked reasonably, the child would be saved.

Without knowing how or why, the Captain began to shout, to yell; that other self burst from him in fury, not the one that was to be strangled tomorrow. His cries transformed themselves into curses and abuse.

The guards burst in, although Ungri had not called and did not seem particularly excited. They seized the Captain by the arms, although he had been manacled the whole time, dragged him down the stairs, and shoved him back into his cell.

Now he was here with his friends, telling his story with frantic language and gestures. Roused and indignant, they listened to him with attention. Ungri's cold-blooded blackmail, as the Captain termed it, shattered in their minds, too, every conception they had formed of authority and the state, of men and officials—now it was perfectly plain what sort of a man Ungri was!—and of their own deaths, which, as they now saw, could not be carried out simply and honorably, as the law provided and as they themselves had imagined. They felt as if they had suddenly lost a last and very important refuge.

Returning again blindly and insatiably to Ungri's blackmail, the Captain weakened rapidly. He stopped dead, stared at them as if he did not recognize them, clutched his head, and burst into tears. "Rade, you are all I have, and they want to take your innocent life with your father's hands!"

They tried to comfort him. Miloš had cogent arguments. The Austrians held strictly to the regulations, and it was not credible that they would proceed without scruple against a child—these were no more than Ungri's naked threats. The old man added: "They're not so black-hearted."

But they failed to convince the Captain and even themselves. The blackmail was so ugly, irrespective of whether it would be carried out or not, that again and again it roused them to indignation. They consciously and intentionally returned to the hideousness of it: it was not in the least surprising that they should hang them if they were capable of treating children in such a way. Distracted, the

Captain at length cried out: "What's the use of living under such ravenous force?"

At that point the door opened. It was already past mid-day, and Ungri, as if nothing had happened, admitted the soldier with an elaborate lunch, and this time with a full-sized bottle of brandy. Ungri threw the Captain a calm, even compassionate glance, and then, when the food had been deposited, calmly left with the soldier.

The three of them remained silent, still thunderstruck by what the Captain had told them, but not yet recovered from Ungri's polite and pitying expression.

The old man was the first to come to. "Is there nothing a wretched human creature does not have to bear?"

The Captain replied immediately, having heard the words rather than grasped their meaning. "I won't have to bear it, but he, he—my Radel!"

The old man broke in. "No, no, Captain Draško, they're breaking your heart."

The Captain seemed to take the old man's words as an acknowledgment; he even smiled in gratitude. Then, noticing the brandy bottle, he leaped toward it and grabbed it with both hands. It flashed into Miloš's mind, especially after the blackmailing of the Captain, that they had deliberately been given more brandy so that they might get thoroughly drunk and spiritually exhausted, and then tomorrow they would give the impression of low-spirited drunkards. Without hesitation he seized the Captain by the arm. "No, Captain, think of your good name," he shouted at him in a stern voice. The old man got up and grabbed Miloš by the arm, firmly but not violently. "Let him be, lad," he said, "He has the pangs of hell all about him. And don't worry about his good name. He'll take care of that."

The Captain tilted the broad neck of the bottle toward his mouth, as if none of this had anything to do with him.

The brandy gurgled as it spilled from both corners of his mouth and down his neck. He drank and drank, in ever longer draughts, but not more than three or four glassfuls in quantity. All at once the gurgling stopped; the brandy spurted for another two or three seconds. Then Draško took the bottle from his mouth and, flinging it into the corner behind the door, where the glass splintered and the liquid splashed all over the place, he cried to his invisible enemies: "You bastards, even if you wipe out Draško's seed, you won't wipe out the seed of Montenegro!"

His companions caught his mad exultation. They hugged him, congratulated him, encouraged him and themselves. The Captain started to laugh, a little too loudly and unrestrainedly, but this laughter was not disagreeable. They saw that the bond of union between them had returned. True enough, it was not the same as before the death sentence, but a different kind of bond, shapeless but incontrovertible. It did not in any way dispel the shadow of death in any one of them. But it united them in the face of death. They admired and approved of one another. The experience made them no stronger individually, but while it lasted they were able to shorten the time—that terrible, eternal time—by mutual encouragement.

United as though full of competitive defiance, they fell upon the food.

Scarcely had they finished lunch when the door unexpectedly opened. A police corporal called Miloš, paying no attention to the splintered glass and the spilled brandy, although the smell of it was stifling in the little room.

Fetters were heard clanking in the corridor; they were manacled the student. The old man glanced inquiringly at the Captain, who answered: "It's the visit of his mother and sister, and the dogs will try to squeeze something out of him, too."

But they took Miloš first of all to the Civil Commissioner, Ljeskovac.

The civil commissioner was an official of the government. Everything that did not fall within the category of purely military affairs came under him—the police, trade, education, local government. Although he was subordinate to the Army Command of the Zone of Occupation, his power—and the real authority was in his hands—inevitably made itself felt. Though technically senior, the military authorities knew from experience that, particularly on political questions, the views and submissions of the civil commissioner would take precedence. The infallible Austrian administration, which had everything worked out to the last detail, had laid down the true relation between the civil commissioner and the military authorities by giving the former these rights and making him answerable to the higher courts in spite of the existence of a competent military authority. Such a delicate and important office imposed an extremely careful choice of the men who were to exercise it. Civil commissioners were at one and the same time lawyers, experienced administrators, and completely trustworthy and well versed in political affairs.

Miloš knew Commissioner Ljeskovac by sight from the days when he first came to Kolašin to take over the local government. All the business of the former Montenegrin provincial authorities had fallen into his hands, and he had become overnight a prominent and important figure. And after his arrest Miloš had come to know him personally, though not well: he had been taken to Ljeskovac's office for talks before his case came up. He had not seen him since then.

The impression Miloš had from these encounters was

further confirmed now: Ljeskovac was reasonable, a trifle slow, but a man of considerable resolve.

He motioned Miloš to a chair, without moving from behind his table; then, throwing back his large, stout frame, he began to drum with his thick fingers on the table while gazing at the wooded hills not far off. His glasses glittered, but his brown eyes remained as calm and expressionless as the rest of him. Boredom was evident in them as well as in that whole white and puffy but powerful body. So marked was this boredom and so completely in harmony with his whole personality that it was almost possible to imagine that he took pleasure in it. And his words, when he spoke, were the same—a gentle drumming, one word after another, with no other difference between them except in meaning.

First of all, he informed Miloš, approval had been given for him to see his mother and sister, and they would be here shortly. But in addition, he had wished at this last moment to offer Miloš a chance of deliverance. The initiative had been the Commissioner's, with the object of saving a young man of education and of helping the pacification of the district, but naturally it had been done with the knowledge and consent of the higher authorities. As Commissioner, Ljeskovac had the right to suspend a death sentence, but grounds had to be provided for such a decision, and only the prisoner himself could supply them. To be specific, if Miloš were willing tomorrow to denounce publicly, before the assembled people, what his brother had done and to condemn it as an act of rebellion, the execution of his sentence would be suspended, and the death sentence itself would later be formally annulled. The Commissioner himself would declare as much publicly, in the name of the higher authorities, so as to eliminate any suspicion of bad faith on the part of the Austrians—which was in any case absurd. Austria's objective was not retali-

ation, but order and peace.

The Commissioner said all this briefly, without any introduction or attempt to persuade, as if he were not particularly concerned about it all, but was merely carrying out his official duty.

Miloš thought that possibly the partisans of an agreement with Austria, to whose faction his brother had belonged, might have been at work and in touch with the Austrian authorities at Cetinje. His execution would make an understanding difficult and would inflame the spirit of rebellion, and this sort of thing was not in the best interest of the Austrian authorities any more than the defiance of Miloš's brother, who at the moment was undoubtedly the most prominent rebel. Ljeskovac said nothing about this, but Miloš knew well the political situation, though since he had been shut up in prison, he might have imagined and exaggerated a lot of things.

At each word Ljeskovac uttered, thoughts came crowding in on Miloš. He examined, turned over, weighed the Commissioner's proposals. But the innumerable currents of life—the longing to be creative, the longing for women's devotion, the longing for the crystal-clear expanses of the mountains—were still alive in him. His personality, divided and torn, was engaged in a bitter struggle to piece itself together again. While Ljeskovac was expounding his proposals, an unceasing internal monologue was splitting him:

It's obvious that I am the victim of political conflicts and interests in which I have hardly any part, and I am not in the least responsible for them. But maybe no one is responsible. People do what they have to, just as they are born without willing it, live a life not framed by them as individuals, and finally die against their will. It's the same in politics and in war. Everyone does, not what he wishes to do, but what is imposed on him by unfathomable circumstances and aims.

I am a pawn in the game. A live human being, but a pawn!

The mountains, now, have already reached maturity. Can one talk of maturity in connection with mountains and not be illogical? Perhaps. Why not? It's summer, July, and the mountains have now their own special, fully mature look.

I have deviated into logic again. There's no way of escaping it! It would be much easier to die without logic, if only one did not think logically.

Should I really let them execute me simply as a means to an end, let them make use of my death as if it were an object—a shoe, for example—in order that they may pursue a given road, attain a given aim? A means, a means of blackmailing and bringing pressure to bear on my brother and the insurgents—that's all I am. Or an instrument of Austrian vindictiveness and terrorism. And if they hang me—as they will hang me—I shall be, for the insurgents, an instrument of propaganda and incitement.

Well, it's all one. I shall be an instrument in any case. Am I really to allow myself to become an instrument? Am I to be an impersonal object, when I am being given an opportunity to defend and preserve myself and to cry: "No, I am alive, I won't surrender myself, I won't pay anybody's accounts, I am not currency, but a living creature!" A human being? A man, young, educated, still with his life to live—Ljeskovac stressed that himself.

Fish don't rise at this season—the finest, tastiest fish, that is, the trout. They are terribly crafty, yet not so much crafty as quick, with swift reflexes. I used to love catching them. As I daydreamed in those days, I used to think and think and then forget all my thoughts. But it was after fishing that fresh, new ideas and images came to me.

Austria, it seems, wants to avoid any sharpening of the situation. By my nonexecution—wherever did I get that

expression from?—it wants to reach my brother, the insurgents, the supporters of an agreement.

Why do I like catching trout? I like to ponder and dream. But it's also because man is by nature a hunter; he began his life as a species by hunting and he always returns gladly and naturally to his primitive origins.

But why trout and not some other fish or some kind of game? Catching trout is a combination of sport and movement—swift currents, clear waters, the fish themselves shy and uncontrollable in all they do. They came into the rivers from some far-off world that no longer exists today, from seas of the Ice Age, as man, too, broke his way through from conditions that no longer exist today.

Catching trout is for intelligent, the most intelligent, people.

I don't agree with my brother's action; it was an impetuous, premature act.

I would go fishing first of all.

No, I will go and look for Divna as soon as possible. The occupation authorities issue passes. I would go to Serbia.

Ha, Serbia and Montenegro have been united at last—under occupation!

I don't agree with my brother's politics either. I went to school in Belgrade; I belong entirely to the younger generation of Montenegrins, who are working unselfishly for the abolition of their own, Montenegrin, state as an obstacle to the union of the Serbs and Yugoslavs inherited from the isolated and epic struggle against the Turks.

But before Divna, the trout—at least one. And to laze a bit. Divna wouldn't be angry if I told her I had been having a good time. I'm young, worn out, full of desire. But that's not important. The important thing is to look for Divna. I'll find her. I've got to find her.

The occupation drove my brother and me together into our father's house. We quarreled more and more often.

And I couldn't rid myself of the notion that in him there spoke the intolerant know-all attitude of the former ruler. And he thought that I was superficial, although that was really a cutting criticism of the new ideas and the younger generation. He is like a father to me—he is nineteen years older than I am, and I barely remember our father. He was among the most prominent men in the clan, in the whole district even, and I had to give way before him, even if it were not a question of brotherly love. I'm giving way to him at this very moment, sacrificing myself to his idea, not mine, and to the tie of brotherhood—ah, that's mine all right!

The wars prevented me, but I long had it in mind and I talked about it to poor Skerlić—yes, he's dead, too, and the misfortunes of the Serbs in this war began with his death—yes, I asked him what he thought of the idea I had to write an essay on the poetry of the Montenegrin hill country—the parts around Kom and Sinjajevina—a poetry full of lushness and color as against the poetry of Old Montenegro, which is deliberately stark and sparing of words, in order not to overlay the truth and the fact.

What is it Ljeskovac is saying? That I should denounce my brother, my own born brother? No, he's not talking of my brother, but of his conduct, his action. Still, it's my brother's conduct. Can one distinguish between my brother and his conduct? Can one separate one from the other?

I wonder whether this difference in Montenegrin poetry comes from the landscape—there it's bare rock, baked and eroded, here it's all forests and grassy mountains and greenery washed by the mountain air.

Greenery? Why am I always haunted by the color green? Who was it who loved green? Divna. But she's not what one would call green.

Or does the difference in this poetry come mainly from

the people—some are more attracted by humane values, by moral principles and ideas, others by beauty and joy?

Before the gallows, and here before Ljeskovac, it would be enough for me to say that I am not responsible for my brother's conduct. I can't say that I don't approve it—that would be to back the Austrians and bring shame on myself. "Unbrotherly!" they'd all say. And so I would be. Or would I? Would they all say it or would only a few feel that way?

From here, through the window, one can see the whole of the western line of peaks, green, of course, green, shimmering in the sun. They are as vivid as if I were seeing them for the first time. The peaks of Sinjajevina are as crystal clear as in a dream. Vučje slopes steeply from the top right down into the Tara, down to yellow Bablja Greda. And there at the end Ostrvica thrusts up into the sky with a spearhead of blue, dripping not with blood, but with silver.

It's true I disagree with my brother. I, too, am for resistance, for revolt; revolt is the history and the poetry of this country. But I would not lift a finger for the Montenegrin state, unless to hurl it into the bottomless pit, and it is ridiculous when somebody, my brother, demands sacrifice for the wounded dignity of the great families of Montenegro, with torn elbows and with an aching void of hunger behind their belts.

I've never been on a single one of those heights.

When I get out, I'll arrange my life, organize my time: so much for learning and education, so much for the family—I'm going to have a family—so much for talk, of course intelligent and useful talk and not just idle chatter, so much for recreation, too, healthy, happy recreation. I shall climb Ostrvica; there must be an unbeatable view from it, a mad whirl of green mountains.

Or perhaps I shan't climb it, but it's just a longing I

have from here, from these prisoner's chains, when I look at Ostrvica shimmering into the infinite.

Are they asking me to rise up against my own born brother? Well, not quite that, and yet—that. Nobody would understand me if I were to do it.

Can one live one's life without being understood? Can I?

My disagreement with my brother isn't, can't be, mustn't be, agreement with the conqueror. Our disagreement is our affair.

I am hanging on to the word "conqueror" as if I were bewitched by it, as if it were a religious ban, a taboo. Yet what the conqueror is doing is important. And what it means to me.

That essay of mine—I had gathered some material for it, they didn't confiscate it—has it any connection with these hills and with the way I see them now? Isn't it perhaps a bit—green?

Skerlić understood how much one should encourage a young man. But did he understand the importance of the question itself? The importance—what is its real importance?

Perhaps my brother, in his heart of hearts, wants me to dissociate myself from him, and that not merely because he would give anything to save me, but because it would help his agreement with Austria. He has quarreled with Austria—but in politics nothing is permanent.

The nation is what matters. Politics is a whore.

My brother is an honorable man.

Here is the importance of that question, of that essay. In the Montenegrin creative genius there are two separate strands—beauty and truth—just as there are in every other creative genius. But in others they are fused. In Montenegro they are separate themes, two different faces. Njegoš

wanted to unite them, and succeeded in doing so, though not always or everywhere. Still, he did succeed, and in a unique way. Njegoš, as no one else did, made wisdom into beauty. That's my own thought.

What will the people say if I dissociate myself from my brother?

The hills are lovely. There's so much loveliness in the world, whichever way one turns. One lives surrounded by beauty, only one doesn't know it, one doesn't know how to enjoy it. I would know; I would know how.

What would the people say?

Nonsense! There is no "people," only individuals. Yet if individuals arrive at like thoughts, the same ideas, if they set themselves to a certain piece of work, then there is a people—a class, a mass, a nation. Individuals would come to the same conclusions: the nation would condemn me. Or perhaps it wouldn't, if this same nation follows my brother and wishes for an agreement. The whole nation is not of one mind. And yet it is a nation. I don't belong to the part of the nation that wants an agreement. And I, as an individual, am part of the nation. I belong to some part of it. What is the part of it to which I belong thinking, what would it say? That part is irreconcilable.

Is there a hill that looks like Zagorka, Zagorka's hill? Jaglika is like Ostrvica. There is no hill like Zagorka. Zagorka is like a mountain pasture in the sun. Divna is like a meadow, a good meadow—there are none such here, in Montenegro. These are romantic comparisons, a bit old-fashioned, but still good—illogical.

Why are the Austrians so eager to save me in particular? It's clear now why they have been so specially polite and attentive to me, as if I were not an offender, let alone marked down to be hanged: they wanted to win me over. Or, at any rate, they were anxious not to embitter rela-

tions by behaving roughly. And, anyway, they are not rough, but crafty. As the peasants say: "They suck your blood gently."

Has my brother got mountains? My brother, as snappish and quick as a greyhound, an intolerant man, but he would always give his life for me. That's the kind of man he is. A wonderful, proud, willful, self-sufficient creature. What we have in common as brothers is not influenced by our opposing views. The Idea is one thing, the brother is another. I can't betray my brother.

But I'm not betraying him, only dissociating myself from an action of his with which I disagree. A brother's a brother, and politics is politics. The people say: You can get love for love, but cheese only for cash.

Nonsense! These popular sayings are full of wisdom, but they're also very harsh and inhuman—*fleurs du mal*. Each one has its opposite. Perhaps that's why they're so wise: truth is one, although it has more than one face.

It's impossible to separate my brother from his actions, impossible at any rate here in the presence of the enemy, without betraying him.

What is betrayal? What is beauty? The question's wrongly put. One should say: "What is not beauty?"

What would the family, the clan, say if I were to dissociate myself from my brother? How long am I to hold to these patriarchal blood ties? I, a modern man. Is it really only a question of blood ties? No, but—but of conscience. And what is conscience? *Nescio quid*.

But this *nescio quid* applies to beauty. And perhaps to conscience, too. Why not? Perhaps it also applies to blood ties. I don't believe in conscience. I do believe in beauty.

And you, Divna, my Divna. Do you remember? It was in the park, in Kalemegdan. Every branch in Kalemegdan was aflower with our love and bowed down to the earth, and every path was moist with our kisses. The two great

rivers, turbid and unrestrained, met in us and flowed on in a joint embrace. That was our love flowing by. Why are we two not forever and ever like the plain lying spread out in a delicious weariness on the banks of our rivers? Why are we two rivers, eternally separate? Why?

Conscience truly is something indefinite, a heap of rules inherited from a given milieu and from the human community in general. I, too, have inherited a number of rules and hold to them even though I know they are inherited. What, after all, is not inherited? Why am I bound to hold to them? Why is a man the son of his nation, of his clan? Why is a man a man?

I have lived such a short while; I have such an appetite for life.

The word "conscience" slipped into my mind and now I can't get clear of it. Now it has spread itself like an obstacle in my path and will not let me dissociate myself from my brother—and from the Idea. My brother's ideas and mine are not the same. Now, all of a sudden I am obsessed by the word "idea," too!

What is an idea? A *nescio quid*! Do ideas exist apart from their realization? No, they do not. How then can ideas be pure when their realizations are impure? Look at the Serb Idea—it is being realized by greedy Belgrade money-grubbers, by unscrupulous politicians and conceited Montenegrin chiefs. A floating froth of intellectuals, officials, and merchants, based on a savage, poverty-stricken people—that is the Serb Idea in actuality. We have to give this idea nobility, realize it cleanly. Nonsense—contrary to the law of the realization of ideas. An idea is beautiful until it wins.

No man has lived long enough and every man has an appetite for life—when faced with death. But I really have had a short life, even if I were not to die tomorrow.

But I am not dying; they are hanging me!

Our Serb devotion to ideas—and my own—is eternal—a devotion to death and in death.

When will ideas become as commonplace to us as everything else in life?

I shall leave no trace behind me.

But Njegoš, what does Njegoš say? "Blessed is he who lives forever."

And I, too, am an idea! So is my brother—a Serb, a Montenegrin Serb idea.

And is Ljeskovac an idea? Has he an idea? Is Ljeskovac a Serb?

Shall I really die tomorrow—on a day like this, wild with sun and greenery?

Who is to ennoble the Serb Idea? It cannot be ennobled. The Idea is noble of itself. Carried out, it becomes squalid, greedy, violent. It is no longer an idea.

Everything is tangled in my head—my brother, conscience, the Idea, reality.

To die on a day like this! To go mad. Wouldn't it be good to go mad on a day like this? But logic and reality don't permit it.

Ideologists and revolutionaries believe in pure ideas. But they don't rule the world, although they set it on fire and turn it upside down.

But why have I to believe in the Idea? And in conscience?

The flowers will go on flowering, the sun will go on shining, but I shan't be here—where could I have read this?

The flower rejoicing in its own beauty, the sun marveling at its own brightness will not exist for me.

Nonsense, I am not a flower, I am not the sun; I am a man! Yes, a man. I came into the world unknowingly, but I leave it knowingly, and tomorrow; tomorrow, on a day like this, I have to tear myself away from it all—from

people, from things, from love, from eternity, from consciousness, from myself.

A philosophical meditation, a lyric in the shade of the gallows, before the Civil Commissioner, Captain Ljeskovac—and a Serb into the bargain! Ljeskovac, too, has his idea, and a Serb, Yugoslav Idea at that—union under the Hapsburg monarchy: thereby we should get the better of the Hungarians and the rest and rapidly acquire European civilization. He calls it hoisting ourselves out of Balkan misery.

But this Balkan misery is sweet.

There are many like him, like Ljeskovac. They even sit in the Vienna Parliament. But today he is hanging Serbs, Yugoslavs, who want another sort of union.

Ljeskovac is heavy, weary. From what? From hanging people? No, he's just a weary official. He doesn't look like a bad man. They're all good fellows, these officials, and yet they hang people. Tomorrow my brother will be hanging those who want a union different from the kind Ljeskovac wants. And the day after tomorrow I should be hanging those who are not in favor of my kind.

No, I won't. I won't have time. I'll die. For the Idea? Really for the Idea? Others will gather the fruits of the Idea, others who would not sacrifice a moment's sleep for it, not a penny, not a single drop of sweat.

And yet one cannot live without an idea, without blood and enthusiasm. Without madmen.

How is one to make life turn into the Idea? No, better still, how is one to turn the Idea into life, simple everyday life? Then there would be no heroes or martyrs; all men would be happy, humble. I am like that, but they won't let me be. Who is it won't let me? I myself.

Oh to go mad, to go mad, to lose oneself in the green day. "Ideas are the captain on the bridge." Who said that? To the devil with ideas!

But I am still to taste pleasures, to fathom the depths of beauty, to leave my imprint. I mustn't die. It's my duty not to die. I owe it to life, to my country, to society. I must live, I've so much to do for them.

I must tear myself away from death and plunge into the growing green of life.

And my brother? The Idea? My conscience?

I have got to live. Life is the greatest value of all. And a duty. Yes, a duty, so that life may come to be for others.

But isn't death sometimes—only sometimes, of course—a duty? Possibly. But not in my case.

A man has a duty to live. And to die.

One only dies once. But one only lives once, remember that!

Who in all this could find his way between life and death, in the midst of death?

14

The talk with Commissioner Ljeskovac—he was practically the only one who spoke—lasted barely half an hour, but Miloš felt the need for an internal respite, to sort out the flood of thoughts, desires, and impressions.

The Commissioner appeared to have noticed this. "There is no need for you to make a decision now. You have time, but not much. Tomorrow will be too late. It will be well for you to see your mother and sister; perhaps they will give you a word of advice."

Ljeskovac shook a copper bell, whose tinkle reminded one of goats and rocks, and with a look signaled the warder when he appeared. Soon thereafter they brought in Miloš's mother and sister. They had, of course, been detained on an army site near the town, where a building had been converted into a temporary camp for the families of rebels.

Miloš's mother was over seventy, small and frail, with a dark, wrinkled skin, and rather weak sight. As they entered she put her arms around her son. His sister was some ten years older than he, with a number of young children and a husband who had taken to the woods. Like Miloš, she was rather tall and brown-haired. Her face was fatigued and strained by prison and worry. She clung to her brother's arm, with which he was trying, vainly, owing to his manacles, to embrace his mother.

The embraces and tears, the cries of grief and despair, threw Miloš back upon the familiar yet ever new reality of death. His mother and sister were sobbing at his funeral. This feeling was so strong and vivid that he could see the funeral procession, and himself in it in some sort of disembodied form, behind the roughly carpentered coffin of the kind they were even now preparing in the village, and and in the coffin lay none other than he himself, in the body which had already felt the strangling of the rope, while drops of rain fell on his face and he heard the wailing and felt the newly dug, gaping grave nearing. The procession moved slowly and silently—more quietly and gently than usual, as if it were held back by its lamentation, an unbroken cry of pain that knew no restraint. Whose lament was this? His mother's? His sister's? All the women of the clan? The wailing of the living over a dead man, over an irreplaceable human being. Every human being is irreplaceable, but this was the being which he himself saw and felt to be irreplaceable. For all of them this being was already dead, and at any moment it would be so for him as well. His childhood with his brother and sister, his mother's tendernesses, and his own loves, thoughts, and hopes, his indignation at the injustice committed against them—everything that makes up life and the reality of living was vanishing slowly and inexorably toward the graveyard on the little piece of level ground at the bottom of his

village, where two lone pine trees, planted there to break the monotony, struggled with their blue-green into space, toward the sun.

Soundless tears poured down his face. He paid no heed to them. He was unaware that his cheeks were wet and that tears were running down his sparse mustaches until Ljeskovac invited the women, who were now a little calmer, to sit down. It seemed to Miloš that the Commissioner's expression was, if not compassionate, at least full of understanding and that he had not taken amiss the women's wailing, still less his tears. The Commissioner even apologized to the women for the need to keep Miloš in manacles. When he had prevailed on them to sit down, he left the office quietly, walking backward and almost bowing, leaving the prisoner alone with his mother and sister.

Since Miloš had noticed his tears, he, or, rather, the Miloš who had existed up till the death sentence and who observed and saw everything, particularly his despair, grew aware of every word spoken and every gesture made, even though his own funeral, which had now disappeared from sight, continued to linger within him.

It struck him that all this politeness on the part of Ljeskovac toward the women and possibly even the permission given for their visit were not merely the customary consideration shown to men under sentence of death, but were also a part of the deliberate game of bargaining for his life. It might well be that some streak of humanity in Ljeskovac had prompted him to try to save a young and, in truth, innocent man. But it would undoubtedly be a personal success for him if he were to persuade Miloš to retract tomorrow, just as the energetic steps he had taken so far, including his condemnation of the same Miloš to death, had undoubtedly been highly regarded by his superiors. In any case, although as a man Ljeskovac perhaps wished to

save him and to be considerate to the women, he was also acting in this way in pursuit of his duty as an Austrian official.

These suspicions and conclusions were further confirmed by the behavior of Miloš's mother and sister, in spite of the indefinite, disjointed, and contradictory character of their protestations. They both immediately fell upon him with entreaties that he save his head, for their sake and for the sake of their love for him, by apparently dissociating himself from his brother and summoning his countrymen to be peaceful and obedient. But they both added in the same breath that he must consider and preserve his good name.

They did not conceal, nor would they have been capable of concealing, the fact that yesterday they had been visited in the camp by distinguished local authorities and by an emissary of the Bishop of Cetinje, who tried to persuade them to use their influence with him. What was more, the Bishop's emissary had stated, and the notables had confirmed, that the Bishop and the Austrian authorities were in direct contact with Miloš's brother and negotiations were going on for his surrender and the pacification of the whole insurgent movement. It turned out that the Austrian authorities had had to sentence Miloš for the sake of their prestige—that had been perfectly clear to him—and could not retract unless Miloš himself were to make some gesture, since to release him would be construed as weakness, and as yielding to the rebels.

Within Miloš there continued that interior monologue which had been started by his short talk with Ljeskovac; only now, in contrast with his mother's and sister's excitement and near madness, his thinking was calmer and soberer.

He asked himself: Why didn't these distinguished au-

thorities and this emissary address themselves to me? And he answered: There could have been a great many, indeed innumerable, reasons for this, but the most important is that I am on the side that is opposed to local authority, and the whole conversation might have turned into a dispute. It's strange, and it isn't, that none of the young intellectuals irreconcilable with Austria came to my mother and sister, but leading men—bigwigs, stuffed shirts, appeasers. And the Austrians didn't want to allow contact between me and the politicians. They don't know how such conversations might end, so it's safer for them that everything remain within the framework of the family and in the secret contact between me and Ijeskovac. The authorities always observe the legal forms; in that lies their strength. The execution of the sentence or a pardon must appear as a lawful act and not as a political bargain and business deal. But that rope squeezes and galls me again.

Both his sister and his mother, as Miloš knew from earlier days, were on the side of his elder brother, the chief, the head of the family and of the clan. To them, therefore, an agreement with Austria, in so far as they could comprehend it, appeared neither unnatural nor shameful, and Miloš's public renunciation they understood as a first step along the path that must be taken by the weaker party—their son and brother—in order to save his life and to pacify the unhappy country. They did not set it out thus. They talked in their peasant way, in which proverbs were interspersed with politics, and politics with their own distresses: there's hope for a slave, but not in the grave; better a peaceful grave than a shameful death; he must save the people from their misery; how wretched they would be without him; his elder brother would deluge the country with fire and blood if he, Miloš, were to lose his life; the local chieftains know what they are saying and what advice to give him; and so on.

But there was a difference between his sister and his mother.

Old and illiterate, his mother was foundering in the whirlpool that was dragging her sons to death. But, accustomed to thinking of the preservation of the family's good name before all else, she was just as afraid of involving them in some shameful action through her own love for them as she was heedless in her longing to have them alive.

His sister, on the other hand, was a quick-witted woman from an environment that lived on politics, so to speak, and after her own fashion she found no difficulty in steering her way through political complications. She did not tell everything, out of a cautious regard for Miloš's views, which were different from those held by her husband and her elder brother; but he gathered from what she did say that to the Austrians the prime consideration was to prevent the union of the two currents of opinion—the pro-Serbian and the pro-Montenegrin—to which their most recent moves were inevitably leading, and to keep Montenegro at the same time under the regime of occupation. The Austrians would like to lean on the party of appeasement, though on terms that suited them. For this reason they would readily agree not to execute Miloš, but he would have to denounce his brother, and, with him, all those elements that did not accept the occupation as an accomplished fact.

However, his sister did not for an instant favor his blackening his good name forever by an act of betrayal at the price of saving his life.

But what is betrayal? What did betrayal mean for the two of them? Who was it, what was it, that spoke through their lips?

It was they who spoke—his mother and his sister—but the solicitation was that of the local leaders, the appeasers. Yet in both of them there clearly appeared that hereditary

hatred, unquenched and unquenchable, that spirit of resistance to the foreigner and the conqueror, that inner necessity for the sons of this land to twist the halter for their own necks.

At the same time, Miloš remembered that in the past there had been Serb mothers and sisters who had allowed their sons and brothers to die in agony and had not consented to plead with them to betray the community or to raise their standard against those of their own blood and faith. Were they, his own mother and sister, like that, or why were they not? And should they be like that, were not the present circumstances rather different? But perhaps they were women of that breed, perhaps they were indeed like those Serb mothers and sisters of the old time. Had not his mother said: "Son, look first to your good name"? And then his sister, though not so clearly, said: "The chiefs say that nobody would see in this one speck of disgrace; it's simply a way of keeping the Austrians happy for a while. Still, look to it yourself; you know what is disgraceful. Keep your life and keep your good name."

But that's just where my difficulty lies—in keeping the Austrians happy! To the chiefs that's not disgrace or betrayal. And to my sister? My sister doesn't know clearly and exactly—she's too fond of her brother! The whole thing is so agonizing, so mixed up—their grief and their tears for me and their fear lest I should disgrace myself. To make the Austrians happy! Only temporarily. Can there be temporary betrayal? And what is betrayal?

A feeling of resistance grew in Miloš, sketchy in its motives, but spontaneous. Not only was the fear of death unable to quell this spirit, but the latter existed and manifested itself quite independently of it. What was this spirit of resistance? What was its nature? Where lay its roots? How deep did they strike? And why was it that he was so strong and independent—yes, independent? It was terrible

how strong in his own judgment he was—now that his mother and sister were here.

He cried out: "Dear Mother, put your arms around me, give me your hand to kiss. I'll keep my good name, I'll do all I can—for your love, for all your pain!"

But do they know what collaboration with the enemy, what "keeping the Austrians happy," means to me, an educated man? There's no allowance to be made for me on the ground that I didn't understand. Anything I may do under compulsion isn't disgraceful, but here it's my own will that decides. It's here, in my own will, that betrayal begins. Won't every fool be able to hold me up to scorn tomorrow and forever after for having disowned my own brother?

Where does compulsion end and my will begin? And what will my brother say? He'll forgive me. All right. But could he forgive a public forswearing of brotherhood? My brother and I may quarrel and part, but we still have to be, we are, brothers, before the rest of the world, let alone before the invader.

Fools and their reproaches aren't important. Nor is my brother, although he's my brother. No one and nothing is important! I'm the only one who matters!

Can I live if I betray? If I betray whom? What is betrayal after all? Dear Sister, Mother dear, what is it, what is it not?

Suddenly he remembered the Captain and the old man. Can I desert them without warning? Must I first talk it all over with them—should they hang and I escape? But their offenses are different from mine, and greater! What links has my life with theirs? We happened to be shut up together, and now I can't get clear of them.

But I have, clearly I have, links with the old man and the Captain. They were condemned to death at the same time as I, and for similar reasons. The difference lies only

in the degree of offense, and all three of us acted against the same enemy. That's the link between us: we have the same enemy. Yes, but my life is my own. I am I.

Then aloud he said to his mother: "I know, Mother. One only lives once. But can I live in disgrace? Can I live against my own will? Can a man do anything against his own will? Oh, grant me life, let me, let me die."

And suddenly he began to shout: "I can't, I can't! How can I promise you, what am I to promise you, if I don't know what to promise myself!"

Up to this point everything had taken place rapidly, fitfully, in a stormy mingling of sobs, tears, and arguments. And although his mother and sister had asked him to do what the Austrians required of him, they urged him to the end to save his good name *and* save his head. He started to argue with them. "What have you got in mind? They have talked and talked at you, and talked you over. That's all politics, and politics is humbug. You tell me that I'm to humbug them, but it would be myself that I would be deceiving. I haven't told you, but there are two other men condemned to death. Are they to hang and am I to escape? No, no, I can't. I can't! That would be wrong, a betrayal. It's not important what other people will say, but I, I can't, I can't! Oh, I don't know, I don't know what to do!"

He could not fathom his own agitation, and still less the force and the grounds of his resistance. But to some extent he gathered what they were from his sister's attitude. She suddenly stopped trying to convince him. She started forward and clutched him convulsively, as though determined never to let him go. "My brother, my sun, the world without you is night without dawn, my only day!" She did not moan or weep. There was only a spasm and a cry, a mad snatching away from death, from irrevocable loss, of a dear, the dearest, creature on earth, and of herself.

This moved Miloš to a fresh flood of tears. This time he

noticed them and knew that he would not be able to control them. Yet even now the two Milošes—the one who longed to live and the one who observed that longing dispassionately and as if from a height—remained separate, merging at times with his sister's grief but quickly breaking away from it.

Suddenly his mother rose to her feet, to the surprise of both Miloš and his sister, in spite of their emotion. She rose from her chair with the lightness of a girl, and a flush broke through the swarthy complexion of her face. She darted rapidly toward her son and daughter, who recoiled in astonishment and unclasped their embrace, and pulled from her blouse her withered breasts, two sad little pouches.

Before that she had from time to time, at the most poignant moments, fumbled with the buttons of her blouse. Miloš knew what that meant: in Montenegro mothers bare their breasts when they wish their children to obey them. It is a primitive entreaty, from the mythical past, in the name of a mother's nurture, in the name of the mysteries of the life she gave to the child. He expected that she would now begin to entreat him not to let his mother's milk be lost and squandered in this way, to save his life by agreeing to the declaration that the Austrian authorities demanded of him. He did not know how or what he should reply to his mother's appeal. He felt a fresh wave of grief and despair, uncertainty and laceration.

He remembered that, like all schoolchildren, he had often been angry with his mother because of her ignorance and failure to adapt herself to modern conditions and his own needs. Alas, and now here he was again, perhaps, on the point of losing his temper with her, and Ljeskovac might interrupt their meeting before everything had been smoothed over and she had forgiven and forgotten. Would it be one more of her failures to understand—and that at a

moment like this? Can my mother really not see the point in a matter like this, which concerns my death and my honor? Perhaps not. She is a mother.

But his mother cried out something he had not expected. "My son, I beg you by the breasts which suckled you—hold fast to your mind and soul!"

She uttered these words in high excitement, yet as if they were words that were not entirely her own but something learned, something handed down—or so they seemed to him, or to that part of him which longed to go on living.

Was this a change of front on his mother's part? Or had her mother's instincts been overborne in an instant by her feelings of honor and pride, as had happened so often before to so many mothers of Serb martyrs? It was then that Miloš, in spite of his feeling of uncertainty, which was further strengthened by a sense that he was finally lost and by a kind of insane pride, understood that that was exactly what had happened to his mother.

Had not his sister grasped their mother's meaning in the same way? His sister began to sob. Miloš buried his face on his mother's bare breasts, sprinkling them with tears. The old woman gently clasped him with her bony hands. He felt her dry, comforting palm behind his ear. She remained, with head raised, calm, almost blissful.

At that moment Ljeskovac appeared, this time in his shirt sleeves and looking, in consequence, still bigger and stouter. He informed them briefly and almost angrily that their meeting was now at an end, and Miloš felt—indeed he was positive—that the Commissioner had been listening and had broken in when, in spite of its indefiniteness, the conversation might be taking a turn unfavorable to his designs.

A warder stood at the open door. He, too, showed impatience at the length of time taken by the old woman and Miloš's sister in kissing and bidding farewell to the pris-

oner. Finally he interposed himself, certainly at a signal given by the Commissioner, between Miloš and the two women, and with arms widespread he slowly but firmly pushed them toward the doorway.

His mother did not cry. She dragged her feet, as though they were wooden, where her glazed eyes led her, repeating the same words: "Your soul, your soul, hold fast, my son!"

Doubled up, shaken with sobs, with her fists at her mouth, his sister tottered behind her, moaning: "Brother, my brother!"

That was a mother—Miloš nearly shouted it aloud—like those Serb mothers of old. And what a sister was his sister! It made him immeasurably and supremely happy, but also bewildered and appalled. His tears at once overflowed. But this confusion of feelings lasted no more than a few minutes.

Hold fast to your soul! My brother!

The door closed.

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Miloš and the Commissioner were left alone. But the Commissioner seemed not to be the man he had been half an hour ago—heavy, weary, crushed with boredom. Furthermore, he sat down, not behind the table, but on the chair opposite Miloš. The chair creaked beneath his weight; his glasses flashed as he moved his eyes rapidly around. He had suddenly become brisk, with quick, almost nervous movements. Without his officer's jacket, and with his bulky body exposed, he was no longer the distant official.

Seeing the Commissioner so lively and approachable, Miloš felt that he might have been mistaken in thinking that he was angry at the turn events had taken with his

mother and sister. But the Commissioner had feigned anger rather than genuinely felt it. Miloš knew this because as soon as they were seated the Commissioner offered him a cigarette, which was not a habit of his; he always kept his distance from the prisoners.

For a second, or perhaps for a fraction of a second, Miloš hesitated whether to accept a cigarette from an Austrian official. He took it, nevertheless, from the silver case. Possibly the Commissioner noticed his hesitation, because he remarked: "But we're still human, after all."

And indeed, during those few seconds—from the acceptance of the cigarette to the first curls of smoke and the beginning of Ljeskovac's exposition—a silent, intimate contact was established between them, and the Miloš who was unable to grasp and accept death quickly abandoned himself to it, just as if one were not a jailer and the other a prisoner. There was so much warmth in it that for the moment Miloš even forgot that he was under sentence of death.

But Ljeskovac's words returned him to reality.

The Commissioner did not expressly emphasize that he was speaking to him as a Serb—which he was in fact—but that could be concluded from his long and apparently not very carefully thought-out discourse.

He set out his point of view:

All ideas are beautiful in themselves. But you will not dispute that the value and the specific practical worth of any idea are to be reckoned according to the possibilities of its realization. The Serb, or, to be exact, the Yugoslav. Idea, as represented by Serbia and by yourselves from an ideal point of view—I'm inclined to believe that that's how you look at it—this Idea has shown itself to be impracticable in the gravest test to which any human creation, including ideas, can be subjected, namely a life-and-death struggle. Both the Serb states have gone under in

the war, and the forces that were to have realized their union have today been either overwhelmed or scattered.

Even today the Serbs' immemorial ill fortune does not leave them: a large head and weak legs, big ideas and small resources. In that lies their whole tragedy. What is left of Serbia, owing to its lack of realism? A handful of wretched refugees who have fallen into the clutches of France. And King Nikola? He has grown old, this once-famous ruler—I myself, when I was at school, used to marvel at his exploits—but today he's playing a double game. He wants the union of all Serbs, both with Serbia and without her, both with Austria and against her. This is unreality.

If one were to presuppose that the Western Powers could win the war—and today the situation on the different fronts is such that it would be the height of naïveté to believe this—even in this case, the Serb, or the Yugoslav, Idea would not be realized in the way you hope, that is to say, as ardent Serb idealists conceive it. The new state, if it ever came to that, would become the inheritance of the most frantic form of nationalism—or, to be more exact, of the chauvinism of the victorious officers' cliques and of unscrupulous bankers and traders. Serbia is economically backward, and would have to make up for this backwardness by a concentrated monopoly of power, which means violence, corruption, the halting of progress. All that will be left of your ideals, you idealists, will be beautiful and painful memories, and you will turn into tragic, ridiculous figures.

But it is not only today—and, I need hardly add, here—that you, personally, have no prospect of realizing your ideas; you have no such prospect in the future either, even on the supposition that the victory, as you imagine it, is actually attained.

What was that you said? Ah, yes, I understand you. It's

of no importance, you say, that the Idea is not realized. No idea ever has been. What is important is that it should bear up and inspire peoples and nations, open up new vistas, clear new pathways. That is true. But ideas only do this so long as they are not transformed into realities. To-day, the Serb Idea, whether it finally succeeds or not, has already reached the stage of transformation into the greedy, violent practices of merchants and generals. There's nothing in it for you any longer.

In stressing this I am very far from thinking that you ought not to be a Serb, and a good Serb at that. I only want to suggest to you that you should also be a practical Serb, that is to say, that you should hold on to what is possible in the realization of your Idea. I am not telling you to be an Austrian Serb, that is, to favor the uniting of Serb and Yugoslav forces within the framework and under the protection of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy—which is today the only practical policy. I say only, do not sacrifice yourself recklessly to an idea at a moment when it is both impossible of realization and has ceased to be at all ideal.

Keep this in mind, too, that your Serb Idea is not the only one that exists. There are others as well—even though they may not be so idealistic. Is it not equally Serb, and a Serb aim, to fight, in league with the other Yugoslavs, for predominance over the Hungarians, or, if you like, over the Austrians, too, within the framework of the Hapsburg monarchy?

I'm glad, and I tell you so in all sincerity, that you see, and at least to some extent acknowledge, that the old Serb Idea, as held by the Serbians, will soon be out of date, whether as unrealistic because it cannot be realized or as unideal because it has been realized.

But in addition to what I have already said to you, I should like to put a question: What are ideas?

You yourself, I see, consider that there are no absolute ideas. Well, the idea of nationalism is barely a century old, and our own nationalist idea is not even as old as that. In pleading the cause of an idea, one is in fact abandoning oneself to something transient and temporary. That is true also of religions, as it is of political and social ideas and of philosophic laws. Ideas sustain and guide a man, but he does not live only by them. They are only one of the factors in his spiritual and other activity. Besides, it is utterly senseless for a man to give himself up entirely to a principle or sacrifice himself for the sake of something that has a transitory, and often a secondary, significance in his life.

Yes, and your remark that people don't in any case live, either physically or mentally, except by expression through concrete forms is completely to the point. Nor do I, when I say that ideas are transient, claim that it is possible to have anything eternal, or, to express it more accurately, absolute, in human existence. The only thing that is eternal and absolute is man's desire to exist and to go on creating new living conditions, better and more modern conditions for his existence. Animals are not capable of that; but they can exist in nature without changing the prevailing conditions. Man cannot do that. To maintain himself as a living creature, he has to change, to broaden, to perfect the conditions under which he lives. Every practical human, and therefore temporary, action, including, of course, ideas themselves, is subject to this absolute law of human existence, this elemental, inescapable urge, which is quite independent of man. A man's complete abandonment, sacrifice even, to any of these practical and contingent forms of activity leads inevitably, sooner or later, to a conflict with this absolute law of human existence, with his absolute will to exist. I do not mean by this that men with the good intention of creating for

themselves, and consequently for those who come after them, adequate living conditions are not sometimes obliged to sacrifice themselves and therefore do so in full consciousness of what they are doing. But they do this, and they ought to do it, only if that is truly the only way to bring about such conditions.

But what will you be achieving by sacrificing yourself to your Serb Idea, contingent as it is, like all the rest, and unreal and unideal in the given situation?

You are achieving nothing but a senseless personal sacrifice, a sacrifice that, even if it has about it a certain tragic greatness, will not inspire anyone in the future, because it is not today in line with any great new idea. And we; on our part, we the authorities and your opponents, will make every effort to see that no one knows of its greatness or of what we are offering you. Your mother and sister, and the leading men and the Bishop, know only of offers made in the most general, exceedingly vague terms. The whole of your internal drama—and to a certain extent mine, too—will die with you. Tomorrow we shall already be spreading it abroad through our agents—we have, thank God, enough and to spare of them, and, strange to say, quite a few among the proud Montenegrins—that you offered us your collaboration in order to save your head but that Austria could not and would not accept it, because she held to the law—a criminal must be punished. In this there is nothing mean or incorrect on our part. You are an opponent, an enemy, and we—the state, authority, the occupying power, the monarchy—are bound to defend ourselves however we can. You would have treated us in the same way, and worse. Don't you regard the monarchy—wrongly, as a matter of fact—as the greatest enemy of the Serbs? And don't you behave accordingly? You will still be on the gallows, and the whole of Montenegro will be talking of your offer to collaborate! I don't

claim that we shall convince everyone of this. But in any case you will not convince everyone either of your own apparent, but actually senseless, heroism.

What are you and in what form will you remain in the memory of the people? At best, as one of the victims of the occupation's violence. No more than that.

You say nothing? What, indeed, can you say to that? You hoped to play at least the part of a hero—a Serb martyr. You lived under a delusion of sacrifice for a great idea. You want to leave behind a legend, a myth of greatness and martyrdom. There will be none of that, even if we do not take the utmost pains to see to it that we bury with you every trace of your imaginary tragic greatness. I say "imaginary" because greatness can only lie along the rising line of progress. Your Serb Idea is no longer on that line, from whichever point of view you look at it.

In your inability to defend the ideal and absolute nature of your Serb Idea you deny the principles of the monarchy. But I have never claimed that Austria-Hungary represents the realization of an absolute idea. No, Austria-Hungary is not perfect. Many states are ahead of us in many respects, but Austria-Hungary has something that they have not. I will go even so far as to say this: Austria as a state contains within itself something of the eternal, imperishable human aspirations. It is the bearer and the incarnation—in so far as that is possible in a given set of circumstances and in a definite form—of the principle of order, yes, of order, peace, and work without which men cannot live. In other words, the monarchy, Austria-Hungary, is the bearer and the incarnation of the principle of the state. The senselessness of anarchism is that in negating the state, that is to say, authority, it in fact negates the longing and need for order that are innate in man. Man cannot exist outside the human community, and the community cannot exist

without order, or, to put it more precisely, without the state. Austria, the monarchy, represents this principle in the highest degree. It may not have achieved the utmost in the direction of individual and collective, class and national, freedom, but it has realized to the full the principle of order.

Of course, today Serb nationalism, and other nationalisms, are bound to be in conflict with this principle, with Austria, with the monarchy, because they express the momentary needs and desires of given groups and classes. But they are bound to go under in the conflict with what is permanent, with order. I will go further and say that even if Austria-Hungary were to collapse, the human need for order would remain indestructible and would rise again sooner or later in a new form, in this very Serb or Yugoslav state of yours.

Men like Ljeskovac are permanent; men like Miloš are not. The former are a product of human nature; the latter represent its momentary need for heroic madness, and they appear constantly, but last only as long as the conditions that produced them. Men like Ljeskovac always exist and they are everywhere. There is good even where there are no heroes, but there is no good without the bearers of order. States and nations pass; order remains.

All I am doing is appealing to you to support this eternal human desire for order as a condition of human existence. This does not mean that the order produced by the monarchy is ideal; what is ideal is the desire, the dream. But in the given circumstances it is the most perfect possible, and, what is important, the sole order possible.

I am but calling on you to help your own people not to destroy themselves by wrecking the order that we are well able to impose.

I have even anticipated your comments. Why then, you ask, did Austria ruin the two Serb states, which were also

the bearers of an order, even if a different one? Why should not disorderly protest against the occupying power be understood as order for the occupied?

I can see that the death sentence has not robbed you of your ingenuity and your skill in splitting hairs.

The Serb states are the bearers of a temporary, nationalistic order, young states, born out of the struggle against the Turks, out of efforts spread over centuries but concluded at a definite, identifiable moment of history. Austria, too, as a form of government and community, even though it is a thousand years old, is in fact transient and temporary. But in it that principle—"principle" is not a good word, it tempts one to consider it as an absolute—that principle of order and that desire for order as the condition of existence of every human community have found their highest expression. That is the point.

No, no, I cannot accept that Austria is only one of the forms of the principle of order, fitted for a certain community at a certain period of time. It is certainly that, but it is also order in the highest possible degree. Do not many nations and different classes inhabit it together? You will find that in no other modern state.

Austria does not, as you think, deny the right of the Serbs to their own state; but it does deny their wish to wreck the degree of order already attained in the monarchy. The Serbs can enjoy their own identity, but not at the expense of the rest, to the loss of other human beings as such, that is, of the human desire for order.

Certainly, the Austrians and Hungarians have predominance over the Slavs in the monarchy, and they long to extend this over the neighboring Slav and other states. But that is a passing phase, no more than an aspect. Order is important, even though it be realized in this way. But within this order, and indeed because of it, the Serbs have the right to fight for their identity, for equality.

There is this, too. Forced to achieve the conditions needed for its existence, humanity is bound to unite without regard for racial or other distinctions. It is bound to do this because the continual expansion of technical knowledge demands a continually widening field and increasingly efficient application. If Austria-Hungary were to collapse, the closer ties among nations would not thereby be weakened; on the contrary, I grant you, they would be increased, because—here again we deal with the principle of order—in the future state the Serb nationalists would not be able to shut themselves up in their fervent nationalism without undermining their own existence. A more perfect order, a more complete community of men—the basic principle of the monarchy—will come into being without Austria or with it. Today, with Austria—that is inevitable and obvious.

And that is important for you, for your life. And for your people. Yes, for your people, too, now that you are talking of their struggle to tear themselves out of the Middle Ages—the Middle Ages forced upon them by the Turkish invasions and prolonged in defiance of all the chronologies of Europe and the rest of mankind.

For you, you say, the coming of Austria has been a conquest like any other—an invasion in modern terms, a frustration of the development of the Serbs in the only way possible for them and acceptable to them, and a transformation of the free Serb states into modern colonies.

There are, of course, these elements in our occupation. But they are not the only ones. Progress does not come except through violence, robbery, and injustice. Austria has conquered the Serb states, but for the sake of their own progress and in the interest of order, a higher order.

Just look at the enormous forests rotting away, here all around us, and all this human energy moldering in unemployment or wasting itself in vain. Just look at these

women in the market place—haggard, in torn skirts, verminous, disheveled, unwashed; there is no flower in sight, no gaiety, no laughter. Time seems not to exist for them; from dawn to dusk they wait for one of our soldiers to buy their couple of pints of milk, their slab of cheese or basket of strawberries. And that's your—our—Serb nation! They need schools, roads, machinery, in order to break out of their semianimal dependence on the forces of nature and to become a nation among nations and human beings among human beings. They need Europe, civilization. Order, that's what they need. Everything else is secondary. It's to that they must devote themselves. It's worth while sacrificing oneself for something of that sort.

But you want to hurl this famished poverty into the chaos of rebellion, against superior military force, which will not, because it cannot, choose its methods. Or even if that is not exactly what you want, you still want to rob this nation, against all reason, of one of its useful members—yourself—a man of education, a young man who ought to be devoting his energies to hoisting these poor wretches out of their harsh, subhuman existence.

No, really, I am too fond of these people and have too much regard for human beings to be indifferent to your fate. I don't deny that I am acting as an Austrian official; but everything that is human in me, everything that is Serb, is stirred.

The occupation is a bad thing, but it's unavoidable. It will pass. And the war will pass. Neither of them depends any more on you. What depends on you is whether you will create and work for your country. And for yourself.

I have said enough for you to understand me. But it's important that you should understand yourself—your vocation and your role in time and space. The rest is all delusion, unreality, or tradition—great and fine and epic, but not real.

What will happen to Captain Draško and old Vuk? That interests you, too! Not that you're concerned merely to catch me in a contradiction: if it is a question of peace and order, why shouldn't they be pardoned, too? But their cases are different. In the first place, they involve killing and the drawing of arms on the occupation forces. No army of occupation can overlook a thing of that kind, especially at a moment when it is obliged to fight for order and peace. No, there's nothing to be done here. It must be clear to you at least that political considerations are decisive. The same considerations that lead the authorities to offer you other prospects force them to uphold the sentences of the Captain and Vuk. That is neither good nor desirable; but it is inevitable. Austria must not show itself weak, but it may show itself reasonable. We realize that the Captain's outburst and Vuk's crime were brought about by the unhappy circumstances of the occupation, by their traditional ideas and their personal characters. We may even pity them. But we cannot, we must not, do anything for them. We would endanger that supreme principle—order. No, there's nothing more to be done.

I understand both your human and your patriotic interest in these two men. I am interested in them myself, in spite of my official duty. But neither my own authority nor any arguments of principle allow me to make any concession whatsoever in these cases. Yes, concession. Every agreement entails concessions by both sides. In the present instance they themselves have made agreement impossible in advance.

Ljeskovac's arguments were all the more persuasive in that they sounded as if he had drawn them from Miloš's own reflections. Yet they did not cause Miloš any real hesitation; that internal resistance aroused in him beyond all doubt at his meeting with his mother and sister seemed to have no connection with facts or with logical deductions. It was now quite clear to Miloš why the spark of resistance had not been struck until that moment; until then, there had been no prospect of his being able to save his life. In addition to that, the very encounter with his mother and sister—the contact with life and with what was dearest in life—had ignited so many inextinguishable sparks of life within him that any resistance, if there was any in him—and obviously there was—had to appear at that moment.

It did not occur to Miloš to examine the origin and nature of this resistance. He did not know exactly whom he was resisting or why. Moreover, he was not really interested; it was still vague and tangled up with other feelings and speculations.

At the beginning of Ljeskovac's exposition he had felt uneasy at being drawn into intimacy with a foreigner, and he never thought of the Commissioner as anything but an Austrian paid official. But he quickly forgot that he was talking to an officer of the occupation and began to agree with him, even openly, on points on which he seemed to be right. Strangely enough, his feeling of resistance was not weakened by this, just as it was not particularly reinforced when he contested what Ljeskovac said, which also happened fairly frequently. Both argument and counter-argument seemed never-ending, and might have been irrepressible and inexhaustible had Ljeskovac not had other things to do besides talking to a man under sentence.

When, at the end of their conversation, Ljeskovac stuffed into his manacled hands a pencil and paper so that he might write the declaration required of him, it seemed to Miloš that the reason for his resistance was going to burst forth unbidden. The very whiteness of the sheet of paper Ljeskovac spread out and then folded before him brought home to Miloš clearly the realization that he was incapable of writing a single word on it, not merely because an officer of the occupation demanded that he should do so, or because it would harm the struggle of his people, or even because it might involve him in personal dishonor forever, but because— Here his thought was interrupted by Ljeskovac's warning: "Draft your declaration. Today it is still not too late; tomorrow it will be."

Until then Miloš had made no promises to the Commissioner. But he had not firmly refused him either. He was aware that not even in the presence of his mother and sister had he clearly and decisively refused the declaration demanded of him. Now, having involuntarily grasped the paper and pencil, he suddenly became more positive than at any previous moment that he could not, simply could not, write, especially on that white, blank piece of paper. And this inability to write a declaration on that white paper embraced the thought that Ljeskovac had interrupted. The whiteness of the paper was not, of course, the decisive factor in this—that he saw. But it would—he knew this clearly and absolutely—bring to light that hidden and independent spirit of resistance the moment he took the pencil in his hand to write his declaration. That whiteness, or Miloš's consciousness of its potency, was the first decisive step in his resistance.

Gripping the pencil and paper with unnecessary firmness, he proceeded, almost against his will, to translate that first step into words: "I can promise you nothing."

"I see that," replied Ljeskovac promptly, "but I have done my part."

In a fraction of a second, at the first word, resistance changed to scornful defiance. Pilate! was Miloš's interpretation of Ljeskovac's reply. There are always Pilates, he thought; we can't do without them! And a Pilate is much the most comfortable thing to be!

Contempt swept over him like a flame, and it would have even if Ljeskovac had not been looking at him with pity and incredulity. Like his feeling of resistance—and perhaps it was that same feeling in altered form—his contempt was independent of facts. With a joy that seemed to him slightly insane, Miloš noticed that this contempt for a moment dominated even the feeling of fear.

As he walked along the corridor, Miloš gave himself up to his contempt, while feeling on the nape of his neck the soft pressure of Ljeskovac's pitying gaze and hearing his insolent, warning words: "Think it over, think it over." Very softly, and without caring whether Ljeskovac was listening to him or whether his words were directed to anyone except himself, Miloš murmured as he went quickly down the wooden stairs: "It was all arranged without me, without my having any part in it!"

It was less than twenty paces to the prison gateway, but the distance was long enough for the intoxication that had started with the whiteness of the paper to take hold of him completely. But this intoxication, too, was peculiar. Miloš was aware of it. He could neither increase it nor diminish it, nor could the intoxication, in its turn, smother the fear of death. It did, however, arm the detached Miloš, and even thrust him into battle against the fear of death. He began to fight his fear with every thought that came into his mind, and thoughts came to him with irresistible strength, with inconceivable rapidity, in multitudes.

Frantic grief and frantic joy were fighting a wild, inconclusive battle.

As soon as the cell door opened, he cried out: "The Austrians want my life or my good name!"

The Captain and the old man met him standing up. They had obviously got up as soon as they heard the footsteps and the keys in the corridor. Instead of greeting or answering him, the Captain embraced him with frantic strength, and the old man squeezed his left forearm with his iron fingers, crying: "Your life, my son!"

Neither he nor his companions asked how or in what way the Austrians wanted to take away his good name, to make him a traitor. Brimming over from his agony and his intoxication, Miloš's words seemed clear enough, and at first needed no explanation.

But that was only the beginning of his struggles and hesitations.

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Their feverish embraces lasted for several minutes, fired by the impatience with which the other two had waited for Miloš's return. The old man gave expression to this after reading the time of day through their little window. "It was getting cooler already, but you didn't come, and worse things can happen than have happened to us. We were beginning to be afraid for you."

Then their usual mood returned; its shores beyond the flowing tide looked clearer and uglier. Of the Captain's wonderfully courageous mood, which was there when Miloš left, there was now no visible trace. The feeling of intoxication had left Miloš when he had uttered the words about the Austrians wanting his life or his good name. Vuk was the only one who remained unchanged the whole

time; calmly aware of his misfortune, he still complained that it was hard for him to leave life.

They began to discuss Miloš's situation—a new element in the calamity and distress of each of them—spontaneously, each in his own way.

Cold, almost dispassionate, and ironic, Miloš stood once more against that other suffering self, tormented almost to madness. And it was the same with the other two. It was impossible to hide that what they were going over in their minds was not so much Miloš's as their own finally decreed and hopeless fate.

They were now firmly convinced that the authorities were eavesdropping and keeping them under constant surveillance. They had heard suspicious rustlings by the door before, and had noticed a different attitude toward each of them. But today's conversations with Ungri and Ijeskovac and everything connected with those conversations not only gave final confirmation to their suspicions, but, so it seemed to them, disclosed the reasons behind this eavesdropping and special surveillance: the authorities had contrived it all to test and break down their resistance. Ijeskovac and Ungri had delivered the final blows; they had increased the ration of brandy, arranged the meetings of the Captain and Miloš with their families, brought pressure to bear on their most sensitive spots, and laid bare their desires and doubts, their weaknesses and their uncertainties.

So far they had seen to it that the authorities should not gain any information from them, although they really had nothing much to reveal. But now, although all secrets had ceased to have any importance for them, they felt it to be of vital importance that the enemy should not be able to deduce anything from their behavior or their conversation. They began to whisper and to dissemble.

Now, looking back, it was even clear to them why they

had been kept together. It had not been merely because of the shortage of cells, since a private house could have been evacuated and turned into a prison. The Austrian officials had known of the political differences between the Captain and Miloš, that one stood for an independent Montenegro and the other was a supporter of Montenegro's union with Serbia. These differences had come out sharply in their conversations right up to the sentence; but since then they had lost significance, even though they were still there, and a human understanding and friendship had begun to form between them with unexpected force. They had put Vuk Rovčanin in with them in order that his crime, which was obviously a serious one, might constantly remind them that they, too, were marked down for the gallows. Possibly they had also reckoned that the Captain and Miloš might find it difficult to get on with a common man like Vuk.

These calculations had clearly proved false so far as relations between Miloš and Draško were concerned, and especially in regard to the relations of these two with Vuk. The student and the old peasant from Rovci had been particularly drawn to each other. But to the prisoners the significant thing was not the extent to which these calculations had proved incorrect, but the fact that they had been made at all and that the authorities were probably considering something worse.

Then they saw that these deductions might go too far. Perhaps the authorities were not following their every word and gesture, but had secured what they wanted—the means of exercising pressure on them—by keeping them in prison, and under sentence of death, with the hour of their execution fixed. Not even an ordinary warder, let alone men like Ljeskovac and Ungri, who were expert at dealing with prisoners and, in particular, with men under

sentence of death, needed any special subtlety or skill to increase this pressure by holding out a prospect of relief from doom. Both Ljeskovac and Ungri must be well aware that all the reactions of men doomed to die lead essentially to an instinctive resistance to death and to irrepressible thoughts of it, and that they must frame their tactics, as the Captain put it, accordingly. A meeting with his family, or with people from outside the world of the prison, rouses in a prisoner a fierce desire for a life in freedom. Isolated as he is, a prisoner feels forgotten and abandoned; this feeling strengthens his anxiety and love for the family he sees as a continuation of the life of which he himself has been deprived. Consequently, it was not to be wondered at that Ljeskovac and Ungri had attempted to secure what they wanted from Miloš and the Captain precisely in conjunction with their meetings with their families. It was obvious that they had acted in this deliberately and that they might continue to have something of the same kind in view.

Miloš and the Captain were not much afraid that Ljeskovac and Ungri might force them to make the declarations they wanted by applying some new pressure. Everything, in the last resort, depended on themselves. But they were as horrified by the thought that the enemy was probing their minds and feelings as a wounded man who cannot bear anyone touching his wounds with rough and dirty hands. For that reason, too, they concealed their wishes, thoughts, and weaknesses. Even the old man saw the almost crucial importance of this concealment, although it could not have the least influence on his fate. He spoke so quietly that the other two understood what he said less by sound than by the quivering of his mustaches—white wings against a face of stone. And it was the old man who voiced the whole huge, obscure purpose of this concealment. "The

devil doesn't trouble himself about human souls to no purpose. He's always thinking up something or other to do with them!"

The consciousness that they were under scrutiny, no doubt for some highly important reason, and the consequent necessity to whisper and to make themselves understood by signs and allusions became a new source of suffering. Miloš even thought that this concealment of theirs was nothing but the effect of deliberate design, an attempt on the enemy's part to torment them and wear them out. The Captain could not help saying: "I'm sorry to think that what we've been through will never be known." Miloš gently countered: "But perhaps it will be. The very ones who are torturing us deliberately like this won't be able to endure it. They'll split, and the truth will get out." But to the old man it seemed to be of no importance whether the truth about their sufferings were ever known. He said: "As long as the Fritzes don't know what we're going through."

This hiding of their feelings from the authorities and the debate on the offer to Miloš went on concurrently. Moreover, the Captain's case at once came into it, and even the old man's. The innumerable reasons in favor of Miloš's making the declaration struck home with complete conviction and force. Such a declaration might affect even the fate of the Captain's son, the old man observed; and perhaps Vuk's as well, the Captain threw in. To Miloš it seemed that in joining their cases to his the Captain and the old man were acting selfishly, both in an engaging way—as when they had rejoiced at his return from the interview with Ljeskovac—and in an ugly way: "Here's one more for the gallows!" But since the conflict between them was, in the main, a wrangling of each of them with himself and with his own defects, this self-centeredness did not make him angry, any more than his did them, and he

continued indefatigably to discover reasons in favor of the declaration. But there were also reasons against, on his side and on theirs, which were inexhaustible, innumerable. These were equally forceful and convincing, if not more so.

There was clearly no end to the clashing and capping of opposing arguments. Yet it was clear, too, that these opposing arguments flowed from the rational marshaling of evidence, although they did not confine themselves to this. They were the echoes and the sparks of their internal suffering, of the deep division of their inmost beings. Miloš felt that the arguments were flooding in on him from all directions, almost as if he were under physical pressure. The conflicting arguments clashed so sharply within him and between themselves that they ceased to be a deliberate chain of reasoning and became simply a wild interacting confusion and a suffocating mass of pain and longing.

The fear of death, whose other face was now the desire for life, became inextricably bound up with his political and moral duty. The two struggled and fought; they strove to get the upper hand of each other and to outwit each other, beyond any hope of disengagement. That's the state in which I shall die, Miloš concluded, and aloud he said: "There's no end to the struggle within man."

And so this frantic, whispered debate went on, equally inconclusive whether it grew bitter or whether it lost its edge and turned into friendly compassion and encouragement. Miloš saw the pointlessness of the debate and that all three of them were exaggerating. The Captain at one moment declared that he had exaggerated in asserting that Miloš's declaration might have had a depressing effect on the people and the insurgents. The next moment he leaped to the other extreme, convincing his companions that the declaration could bring nothing but advantage to the people and the insurgents. But noticing his own inconsist-

ency, he laughed wryly. "Whichever way you turn, it's no good. I've tangled myself up like a hen in the wire."

Not even the old man, who usually found the right word and the sound argument in any situation—Miloš and the Captain had come to expect this of him—was able to get them out of the tangle. He did not even show any particular wish to do so. It emerged from everything he said that he felt it would be a good thing if Miloš could double-cross the Fritzes, that it was a shame that he should die so young, but that in no case ought he to bring disgrace on his good name. The Captain and Miloš noticed the lack of consistency; it reminded Miloš of his mother.

But Vuk Rovčanin seemed to take no account of inconsistencies; he simply said what he thought and felt at a given moment. When Miloš and the Captain suggested that it was not possible both to double-cross and to keep one's good name, he justified himself: "Well, I can't condemn a brother Serb to death, whether he has deserved it or not." Although this was far from clear, it might be taken to mean that Miloš could make his declaration in order to remain alive. But the old man added immediately: "Everything a man has to save can be covered with two fingers." As he said this he touched his face. This seemed a rebuttal of the argument he had only just uttered. They pressed the old man to explain himself, but he tried to wriggle out of it. Finally he said: "A man is bound to save both his life and his good name, and if it comes to choosing—there is no choice!"

"What do you mean?" shouted the Captain.

"Tell us, tell us," Miloš begged him.

The old man hesitated, and finally, wrenching the words painfully out, said: "Every man makes his own decision according to how much of a man he is."

The old man obviously saw no obscurity in these words. But Miloš did. The Captain saw a contradiction in them,

and remarked: "Tell me how one can save both—good name and life—I know the rest."

Miloš wondered what it was the Captain knew. Did Vuk know it, too? Did he, Miloš, know it?

But before he could attempt to get an answer, the conversation, quite out of control, had slid off in another direction. The Captain was pointing out how much more peaceful their life had been since the death sentence, and how much more agreeable, until Ungri and Ljeskovac had come up with their proposals. He put it this way: "Offer a man condemned to death a straw to hang on to and you plunge him into agonies a hundred times worse."

Ljeskovac and Ungri had not left Miloš and the Captain to make their peace as best they could with death. Up to the time of the proposals, each had awaited death with limitless grief and suffering, but that had been all. Now they themselves had to decide whether they would die or not—the Captain in the sense that his son's future was at stake, and Miloš absolutely.

Miloš noticed with sharp anguish that this was not the same thing as suicide. When a man commits suicide, he kills that self for which life has become a superfluity and therefore would be alien and intolerable. But they were now sitting in judgment on themselves although they felt neither guilty nor superfluous.

The old man was free of all this. Although there were moments when the hope was roused in him that declarations made by the other two might incline the Austrians to pardon him as well, on the whole there prevailed in him beyond question a hopeless conviction that he was bound to die. Darkness had almost fallen when he declared, with a painful and knotted tenseness which seemed to grow upon him with the waning day: "But the Fritzes don't take the least account of me; they don't ask anything of me."

This statement worked on Miloš like the discovery of some great and ultimate truth. Since his arrest, and more particularly since the death sentence, he had been inclined to look for ultimate truths. They were indeed killing the old man without hesitation, not because of his crime, but because no bargain with him would bring them any advantage.

They fell silent. Miloš could see that the Captain's head was drooping like his own. As though he had attached no significance to what he had said, the old man got up and, puffing from the pain in the small of his back, went over to the shelf to light the lamp.

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Almost simultaneously with the lighting of the lamp, the door opened. Out of the half-darkness of the corridor Ljeskovac, Ungri, and Father Mirko advanced into the yellow glow.

The prisoners knew that Father Mirko was now the only priest in the town, so that it depended neither on him nor on them who would hear their confession. But, depressed as they were, each in his fashion, they were glad to see him.

Father Mirko was young, small, and rather thin, and the feminine quality of his good looks was particularly heightened by the fact that he parted his silky, curly hair in the middle. He spoke in a singsong, rather womanish voice, using mild, carefully chosen words. But unlike most modern Montenegrin priests, his inflections were not a result of excessive chanting and of training to be a gentle shepherd for his flock and not an illiterate bandit, like the clergy of earlier times. Father Mirko was by nature a mild man, and, although young, he was widely known for his quiet and moderate disposition.

Since the prison had no adjoining cell, Miloš and the Captain were led out and pushed into a corner of the corridor, leaving the priest and Vuk alone. Ljeskovac and Ungri withdrew to the end of the corridor, so that they could not, even by accident, overhear what the priest and the prisoner said to each other in the cell.

Miloš noticed the enquiring look Ljeskovac gave him two or three times as he entered the room. Miloš gave him a glance in return, and Ljeskovac understood that his proposal had not been accepted and that Miloš had not written the declaration. He thereupon appeared to withdraw into himself with outward equanimity, but not without the kind of pitying indignation one might exhibit toward a debtor whose debt has to be remitted because he is unable to repay it. Miloš noticed also that Ungri looked at the Captain, though not enquiringly, but with a cold and venomous severity. The Captain returned his look in a similar, if not identical, way. Miloš felt, and was afraid it was true, that the look he had given Ljeskovac had been not only indefinite, but dejected as well and completely devoid of hate. This feeling continued after Ljeskovac and Ungri had withdrawn to the end of the corridor. His attention was held by the whispering between the two of them, and it seemed to him that this related to him. The Captain, normally so talkative, was silent, plunged in his own thoughts before confession.

The old man did not remain long at his confession, and his very appearance lifted Miloš out of his vague depression.

Vuk returned with measured, reflective steps. "Well, a man relieves his mind," he whispered as he came up to Miloš in the corner. Then he added, almost with regret: "Even though he hasn't sinned."

Miloš knew well the sensation caused by confession, although he had never confessed himself to a priest. To

him it was like confiding in a very close friend—he only confessed himself to close friends—some offense committed against him, and then being forgiven for it. A blessed peace takes hold of one. But nothing of that kind was visible in old Vuk. He was merely a little calmer, shivered less often, and fiddled with his mustaches less.

Vuk Rovčanin felt himself indeed to be a man with no great sins on his conscience. He had neither stolen nor lied. He had certainly killed quite a number of people, but they had been enemies—Moslems, whom he called Turks, and members of other clans, at times when bloody revenge was the most sacred duty laid upon all men of the clan. Killings of this kind were not sin, certainly not the kind of sin one need confess. He had not killed for his own advantage, but in battle, out of his duty toward his religion and his clan. He had also done a good deal of plundering, but plundering is not robbery when it is the enemy who is plundered. But neither in killing nor in plundering had he ever done anything tradition considered inhuman—the maltreatment of women, children, and the infirm. Nor had he ever carried off bedding or crockery or the last morsel of food from a family, let alone taken anything from mosques, since there people meet with God.

For this reason Vuk had nothing much to confess. The priest had absolved him and given him communion. Thereafter, Miloš knew, another life had begun for the old man, although this present life of suffering had not yet been extinguished. That other, detached Vuk, who was aware of death and fear and was powerless and even reluctant to resist it, was no doubt finding peace, disappearing in fusion with another world, not his own, and giving himself up to eternity and to the immortal beatitude of the soul.

Miloš felt that he knew the old man well, and now, in spite of his own irresolution and distress, or perhaps be-

cause of them, he went over in his mind why it was that this man regarded himself as not having sinned.

The old man, on the other hand, seemed to be following some train of thought of his own or, as he often did, to be slowly turning over accumulated experiences and facts, meditating vaguely and freely upon them. Now that everything had fitted itself together and arranged itself in his head, he said out loud: "Death is evil, and a man is a man and mustn't give in to evil."

Miloš tried to grasp the trend of the old man's thought. It must have been: fear of death, confession as a pacification, and a strengthening in the struggle against death. Yes. But clearly that was not all. Miloš had been in the habit of interpreting the old man's behavior and utterances in his own learned way, but this time he did it with such a sudden and irresistible impatience that he himself was surprised.

The old man held—as Miloš knew from earlier discussions in the cell—that the soul and the reason are immortal and divine by their nature and origin—thereby man has affinity with God—and that they are given to man so that he may resist evil. To defend oneself against evil, to crush evil with evil, is not sin if a man in doing so still keeps his reason and his quality of soul, if he does not transform himself into a beast, into something inhuman, if he does not surrender himself to that evil, bodily, greedy, carnal, violent side of his nature. This view had its roots in the earliest Slavonic and, still more, in the oldest Eastern beliefs, and had obviously been adapted, like Vuk's conception of sin, to Balkan and Montenegrin conditions, more particularly to the conditions arising out of the struggle against the Turks. Now the old man, prompted clearly by the expectation of his own execution, had applied this point of view to death: death is evil, even though it destroys the evil, bodily side of man, because it torments

man's soul and confounds man's reason. But power is given to man, through his soul and his reason, to fight against death and remain man—spirit, reason, soul, mind. Death is bad, but man is man because it is given to him not to surrender to evil, or to that evil known as death.

But even after this train of argument, everything was not clear to Miloš. The argument itself had not been carried through to the end. What is evil? Where does it come from? With what does man fight against the evil known as death? With the knowledge that he is a man. Man is man because he has within himself a soul, a mind, God. That is no explanation either of the evil known as death or of evil generally, or of man's inevitable war against both. It might be so for the old man, because he believed in God; but for those who do not believe, the mystery remains almost unbroached.

Miloš knew that it would be pointless to ask the old man to explain his views and utterances. Vuk did not build up his ideas on a basis of reflection and analysis; they would emerge complete after long, incomprehensible, and inexplicable deliberations within himself and as a result of his experience. His thought was not deliberate, and therefore not reproducible, and he expressed his thoughts spontaneously, as they ripened, just as he breathed and took food when he was hungry. For that reason he was not only incapable of explaining the train of his thoughts and his conclusions, but he regarded them as final. He could not understand that a thought, once uttered, must have some sort of explanation behind it, unless it related to a fact or datum. Any explanation, if there were one, Miloš would have to find for himself.

Yet it was important—Miloš did not know exactly why—to discover the trend and the meaning of the old man's thought. For Vuk himself, this last thought of his was evidently important; he fell silent after he had uttered it.

It is true that the taciturn old man usually fell silent after his utterances. He never imagined that he was saying anything wise or exceptional, and even Miloš had never taken much notice of what he said until the death sentence, although he had been struck by Vuk's tranquillity, so unlike that of people of his age, and by the ease with which he adapted himself to everything. Now he was silent again, but his face expressed a calm that was different from the calm habitual to him; he was even smiling blissfully, as if he had discovered some secret that had vexed him for a long time, for all his life.

Miloš had not succeeded in finding an explanation, nor had the old man stirred from his joyful calm, when the Captain returned. His expression, too, was one of tranquillity, of blissfulness even, though he was shaken by spasms of pain. He was brushing up his mustaches again and twisting them in his old manner, though he was still whispering something. Was he finishing a prayer? Words of thanksgiving? Doubts? Miloš did not hear the words, and the Captain was evidently not conscious of whispering. Miloš's glance, directed at his lips, made him aware of it; he caught himself and smiled shamefacedly, not at all like himself.

Father Mirko appeared in the doorway, folding the maniple around the cross. He and Miloš had been in the same class in secondary school for a time. They had been good friends. Everyone had been friendly with Mirko, but there was something special in his relationship with Miloš. Miloš had been a sort of protector of the pale, weakly boy. In defending him once against the town boys, he was hit by a stone; the scar could still be seen on his left temple where he parted his hair.

Miloš recalled his friendship with Mirko and the incident with the stone, and automatically felt for the scar. Mirko, too, evidently remembered it; noticing Miloš's

gesture, he smiled gently and sadly. Then, as if he were dispelling and at the same time confirming the memory, he remarked: "You, I know, don't want to confess yourself. But perhaps you would like to have a word with me as a former friend and as a man."

Miloš hesitated. He would in fact have liked to be alone, even for a short time, with a friend of his boyhood and with the early memories of his life. But he quickly dismissed this wish, finding in it not so much weakness and inconsistency as disinclination to be a trouble to the priest and to convert the right to confession into something else, into a friendly chat.

"Yes, it would be nice," he agreed, and immediately refused. "But better not, better not."

Mirko's eyes filled with tears.

Miloš added: "Never mind. Say good-by for me." He did not say to whom the priest was to say good-by. He was not even thinking of any particular person, but just of friends who might remember and ask after him.

The priest understood. "I will, I'll say good-by for you. I shall always remember."

Noticing that something out of the ordinary was passing between the priest and the prisoner, Ljeskovac approached them, with an enquiring, artificial smile roving over his fat face. "*Was ist das?*" Then he immediately added in Serbian, turning to Miloš: "And you? You have not made your confession? You don't want to?" He looked incredulous, and his smile suddenly froze. What could this mean? Then, misinterpreting Miloš's calm, he concluded: "But thank God, you've changed your mind."

The priest and Miloš both noticed the mistake, each in his own way, and Miloš hastened to reply. "No. I do not believe in God."

At first Commissioner Ljeskovac was vaguely surprised. He had heard something of this, but he had not regarded

it as very serious. Atheism and, more particularly, disbelief in Christianity were fashionable not only among socialists, but also among young people of education. The Commissioner's surprise changed, before the eyes of them all, into an equally vague thoughtfulness and into a veiled, ambiguous smile. They remained standing, silent, following and studying the change that had come over him. Only the old man still retained his tranquil expression, as if he had neither heard nor noticed anything. The Captain, however, though still plunged in his own thoughts, was obviously following every word and every gesture.

Miloš's declaration could not surprise the Captain and the old man. They knew from their conversations with him, although he had not emphasized it, that he did not believe in God. If by chance the talk turned to the subject, the Captain would normally be all afire to prove to Miloš, by his simplified arguments, the existence of God. The old man, on the other hand, did not take much interest in this problem. The young scholar was quibbling out of books, but he, too, believed in some sort of God, whatever tales he might tell, since a man could not be a man without some sort of belief. Father Mirko had long been aware of his friend's views from lengthy and learned discussions with him, and knew that he was not to be shaken in them. Ungri was not interested in this point, though he was interested in Ljeskovac's enigmatic, seemingly thoughtful expression.

Ljeskovac finally motioned with his hand as a sign that they must break up; the prisoners moved into their cell, and the rest of them left.

The supper had already been brought in. There were three bottles of brandy. The three prisoners looked at each other with suspicious understanding, and the Captain gave a scornful smile and decided: "We won't taste a drop." Agreeing with him, and thinking no doubt of his confession, the old man added: "We don't need any drink any more." Miloš was astonished to find that he, too, felt no need of brandy and that a peace of mind he had not known before was slowly but totally enfolding him.

They sat down to supper listlessly, but in a calmer frame of mind.

Scarcely had they finished eating when Miloš was summoned, with all his belongings, although he had nothing but what he was in, his greatcoat, and some underwear. He stuffed the underwear into his coat pocket, threw the coat over his arm, and went, followed by the sad, questioning, and truly friendly gaze of his companions and looking back at them in the same way. He carried the memory of these glances with him as they were fettering him in the corridor after the door had shut, and while crossing the cobbled courtyard, on which his and the warder's wooden soles clacked sharply and icily.

He was taken into the building next to the Commissioner's office, where he had been once before that day, and shut into a large room on the ground floor which had two iron beds in the corners and a big table under the window. There were no bars to the window, so they tied his hands with a chain to the bed in the left-hand corner. The room, sparsely and gloomily furnished, and no doubt for men on duty, was little better than the prison cell, and Miloš would hardly have felt any difference if he had not been separated from his companions.

There was no lamp in the room. His chain was too short

for him to walk about. He looked around the room and gazed out of the window. Every now and then a guard went by, his bayonet icier and keener than the moonlight which shone blue upon it. Moonlight. Was moonlight still glorious? And the bayonet. Why must there be bayonets? And in the moonlight, too. The bayonet was not more beautiful, but more terrible, when bathed in moonlight. It would have been better if there had been no moon; there are no bayonets in the dark. But in the dark one can hear the soldiers' boots. The whole of Europe had put on boots like that—guards' boots—and was trampling and killing itself. These were soldiers' boots, and European, here in this land of rawhide peasants' sandals.

Angered by such thoughts, Miloš threw himself on the bed. But there, too, he felt uncomfortable; he could not get his tied hands behind the nape of his neck, which was galled by the iron rods of the headboard. He pulled out the straw pillow and propped it lengthwise against the headboard; then he could lean back, and think. It was so important to think, he suddenly decided. Comfort and peace were here.

He felt that they had brought him here to get him away from the other two—perhaps so that they should not influence him. He was unable to fathom the real reason, but that did not worry him much. In any case, he was faced with a night of mystery. They would try once again to persuade him, they might even torture him, but it was not to be ruled out that they might leave him in peace and simply lead him out to be hanged tomorrow.

Although the thought did cross his mind, Miloš did not seriously imagine that they might pardon him. Oddly enough, as soon as he stopped remembering his companions' last glances, he felt an almost total indifference about having been torn away from his friends on this last night. He felt a fatigue that was not bodily, but spiritual, a

spiritual exhaustion, a weariness that came of too much thought. And, strangest of all, he found both this indifference and this exhaustion pleasurable; the fear of death seemed to give way, to weaken before them.

Actually, the fear of death had changed into something he could not exactly define. In general, since the death sentence, he had found difficulty in asserting anything positively or expressing anything definitely; it was something like a feeling of bodily annihilation, a sinking into nonexistence. This annihilation, this nonexistence, was, strangely enough, real, something that existed, and if death were not to wreck all his powers of reasoning, he could establish it as a material, as well as imaginary, reality. Yes, imaginary, yet so real—the reality of absolute annihilation, of total nonexistence, which he would not be there to define. The mind could not grasp such an annihilation, nor the senses feel it. Nevertheless, it existed. He knew it. He felt it. But this knowledge was different from the knowledge that with death man is transformed into new forms of matter. Miloš could no longer conceive any kind of form; he could only comprehend this annihilation, this nonexistence, with a mind and senses that seemed not to be his own. That in itself was not so terrible, nor did Miloš feel fear in the face of it, as he did in the face of death.

But the most terrible thing of all was that soon he would feel neither fear nor terror. The conception of death, both his own and death in general, as annihilation had begun hesitatingly to emerge in his thoughts and feelings after the old man's return from confession and that enigmatic remark of his. It had now developed its full force. Everything else had become subordinate to it, and both Milošes had become submerged and fused in it—the Miloš who longed agonizingly for life and dreaded death and the cool, rational one who looked at everything, even himself, like

a stranger. What would remain of him if that detached Miloš and the naked, frantic instinct to flee from death should vanish?

"I shall go mad, I shall go mad!" Miloš shouted. But he did not feel that it would be in the least terrible if he were to go mad. He knew that he would not go mad.

He shivered. He felt that he was shivering lightly, internally, intolerably, on this warm, humid night. And he thought coolly, craftily even, although there were no plans to think out and no one to outwit.

I shall enter, I am entering, annihilation, he thought.

Side by side with the inconceivable idea of annihilation and yet independent of it, there rose in Miloš memories of sin, of an indefinite sinfulness. He thought that this feeling of sin had been prompted by his companions' confession, because during the last two days he had reacted directly to external events.

He slyly conceded to himself that he was yielding to traditional religious beliefs, which he did not accept, and to conscience, which he did not acknowledge. He laughed scornfully at himself and thought: It would not be so bad if I believed in God and awaited death with composure. At one and the same time he dreaded madness and vainly longed for it.

But whatever he did—and he did nothing but brood, torn increasingly between the two contradictory feelings of annihilation and sin—he was soothed and overcome by the vague yet powerful memory of sinfulness.

He, too, had his sins. Trivial ones, certainly, but innumerable. In prison he had often recalled many individual sins, especially after the trial. But since the death sentence he had been thinking constantly of his sinfulness, or, rather, the thought had imposed itself on him, without priest or rite, which he still regarded as the purest superstition.

So that's how it is when a man is about to die—he is settling accounts. With whom? Well, with no one. With whatever did in fact happen but might have been better, finer, both for himself and for others. From time immemorial people have known about this last, unavoidable settlement of accounts. Religions have built on this as on other unchanging human qualities—hence confession. Of course, for those who believe. I don't need it, he thought. I don't believe. Briefly, clearly, finally, I don't believe. And yet, a man has to make his confession, even though he does not believe. He has to make it to himself. It's silly and superfluous for a man who does not believe either in God or in conscience. But it's unavoidable, even pleasant.

He had deceived Divna two or three times. It was of no importance when, how, or with whom, or that it had been purely incidental. Still, it had happened.

He did not count the affair with Zagorka among these deceptions. He had no regrets about that nor did he feel it as a deception. It had been from the heart and with all his being, like his love for Divna, though of a different sort. He would tell Divna everything except about Zagorka, to avoid telling her that he had enjoyed the same fullness of love as with her. But she would forgive him, he was certain, if told how it had been. But it would grieve her that such a thing had happened—no, he would not tell her. Yet he was sorry that he would not be able to tell her.

Forgive me, Divna.

He had often angered his brother by that crisp arrogance and standoffishness of his. They had had a quarrel—he did not remember how it had arisen, nor was the cause of it important—the day before the incident that had finally parted them. Where was his brother now? Somewhere in the woods. Perhaps he was also looking at the moonlight sparkling in the drops on the leaves, as it was doing here on the lime tree. He could see from the bed the crown of

the tree, dark green sprinkled with silver. Does the lime tree know about death and moonlight? Nights in the woods are wet. His brother would have a hard time and maybe even fall ill.

I never took leave of my brother as I should have done, he thought, my dear born brother.

But he had taken leave of his mother. And of his sister. He had never done any harm to his sister. To his mother, yes. His sister had nothing to forgive him. She would only have to mourn for him—always and inconsolably. His mother had forgiven all; even he did not remember a single one of the griefs and injuries he had brought on her, though he knew he had. His mother had forgiven all; mothers do not recall wrongs. All men remember their mothers and mention them in their dying hour.

Shall I remember, too, Mother?

"Look to your soul."

What does my mother think about the soul? The same as old Vuk—that it is the divine in man. I would translate that as the good in man. Good and evil are purely human categories. From that point of view there is no such thing as good and evil for man—that is to say, for whatever it is in man that makes him man.

"Look to your soul."

He began to recall, too, the trouble he had caused other people—friends, teachers, fellow soldiers. A few incidents came back to him, not as they had occurred, but as they had stayed in his mind, drained of all concrete detail.

Was this that reckoning with oneself that precedes death? Yes, clearly it was something of the kind. Strange that the reckoning is so quickly and easily made; but made it is, and continually, reckoned in every moment. The reckoning will go on until tomorrow, and yet even now it is being settled. And it will be settled in that last, endless, interminable moment of annihilation.

The night flowed over him and into him, as if there were no end to it. The moon had climbed to the right of the lime-tree top; the leaves grew blacker and more silvery—and more indifferent to death and life.

Suddenly he could hear the night flowing on—like water dripping. No, where would water come from? It was the moonlight dripping. But moonlight does not drip, cannot be heard—except in poetic metaphors. What was dripping? The steps of the guard—the only sound, the only trace of human life in this little town, dead at night even in peacetime. The steps of the army of occupation measure the night; they measure eternity and my time in this newly founded town, not a day older than its young lime trees.

The Turks, it is true, had built a fortress on this land nearly three centuries ago. But the insurgent clans had leveled it with the ground sixty years back, together with the towers of the begs, and just thirty years ago the building of the town and the planting of the limes had begun, and with this planting of trees, with the butchers' shops, the gypsy blacksmiths by the stream, with the inn, the markets, and the regional commanders, began the wrenching of this population out of the alien Middle Ages, out of the primeval clan formations, and a nation appeared on the European and the world stage. And now the steps of the occupying army—European, civilized, impersonal—were measuring this advance and Miloš's death.

They won't let us into Europe, and me they will hang tomorrow.

The footsteps continued to drip. In books there is always a dripping of water before an execution. And the beating of drums. They'll beat for me, too, to announce my death, to measure out the time, the time of our emergence onto the stage of Europe and the world, the time of my hanging.

But I have not many sins. I use the word "sin" as if I were religious. But the expression isn't important. We atheists, for that matter, haven't yet invented a substitute for it. The idea is important. It is important what I think—if I can still think. I don't really believe in sin, yet I remember mine as if I were a believer, and a devout believer at that.

My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me? Christ on the Cross in his last moments. Ha, I may become a Christian yet.

But I should like to leave myself, not to be alone with myself, left to myself. Why have I left myself to myself? Confusing, a play on words. Yet I am alone, alone before myself, alone in myself.

Evidently this calms me. But what is it that calms me? My conscience. There is no such thing as conscience. Conscience—a fiction owing to fear in the presence of the mystery of death, an anachronism, a relic of primitive beliefs. And yet it has a calming effect. On whom? On me, the one who still survives. That means I myself am conscience—the "man" old Vuk spoke of. But not the man I shall be, the man who will be nothing, annihilated. Annihilation does not calm one. It swells, devours everything, more and more irresistibly.

Why, why can I not leave myself? Why must I be annihilated? Why can I not give myself over to conscious madness? Why can I not cease to be what I am? Why am I—I?

To get out of oneself. To be what I am not. To escape. To escape no matter where, no matter how. Not from captivity, not even from death. From myself, from annihilation, in this night to whose dripping there is no end.

He got up quietly, conscious that this was what a sleepwalker would do. He opened the window in order to hear

any sound but that endless dripping. The scent of the moonlight poured into the room, into his nostrils, into his whole being.

No, it was the scent of the lime trees; moonlight has no scent except in the poetry of the Symbolists. The lime trees are alive and will go on living. People and insects will go on living.

The dripping stopped. Now it was the sound of army boots on the cobbles. The blows, the stabs of annihilation. Annihilation with a capital A—it's already an idea, a world of its own, unexplored and unexplorable.

The guard halted. He must have heard the window opening and was now looking suspiciously to see what had happened. With the silence there suddenly came the memories of sins—and peace. A peace that brought peacefulness but could not drive away annihilation, which was annihilation and nothing more, and which was the only thing that would remain after it all, stronger than any other thing.

It was better when there was silence, even if accompanied by the sound of trickling. Even by annihilation, since that was repentance and peace.

Miloš shut the window and lay down again on the bed. Time fell drop by drop. Drop by drop fell annihilation, memories, and silence, madness and thoughts that were agonizingly clear and undisturbed by anything.

There is no end to anything.

Yet there will come an end to all things.

Tomorrow.

Miloš could not tell, even approximately, how long this nightmare of peace and annihilation and drops falling in the silence lasted.

Out of the deafness of the night the door opened; there was a glare of light from the round white shade of a lamp. And there was Ljeskovac, in his shirt sleeves once more. It must have been the dead of night, somewhere around midnight, since Miloš felt that he was at the end of his strength, while Ljeskovac seemed to have enjoyed his first sleep, the most important from the point of view of fatigue.

Not even this last night could pass without Ljeskovac! Miloš thought. But could it have passed if he had not come—abandoned to its own slow passage, with me abandoned to myself? It was better that Ljeskovac had come. We shall talk the night away; the time will pass.

Ljeskovac brought in the lamp and put it on the table. He hung his heavy stick on the end of Miloš's bed. He moved lightly and unhesitatingly, as if he were not a heavy man and as if he were in his own room. He took out a cigarette case and matches and put them on the table within reach of Miloš and himself and lowered his heavy frame carefully onto the other bed.

After this his movements became slower than ever. Even his expression became dull, unalteringly cold and careworn. He gazed for a long time at Miloš, as if he were seeing him for the first time, and his yellow eyes shone staringly through his glasses.

Miloš crouched on the bed as if he were preparing to defend himself. Yes, just as if in self-defense, he felt, although he could not imagine that there was anything left to defend himself from. Furthermore, he could see no necessity, no need, for such an idea. He crouched simply by instinct, to ward off something unknown and, it seemed

to him, nonexistent, but from which he had still to defend himself.

Ljeskovac's scrutiny and Miloš's crouching lasted painfully long. Ljeskovac, of course, desired this, though it was obvious to Miloš that in doing this the Commissioner was also inflicting pain on himself.

At last Ljeskovac broke silence in a distant, hoarse, unfamiliar voice. "Do you know what death is?"

Miloš would have liked to reply, "Do you know at all what death is?" but he answered with a very commonplace thought and expression. "Who can know what death is? No one has ever returned from its shores; it has no shores, so how could we know what it is? Those who were apparently dead, but were in fact still alive, even they can tell us nothing of death. But it is absolutely certain, and has been scientifically proved, that they neither feel nor know anything else about death but what they know at the moment of losing consciousness. Consequently, death is terrible only to our mind, our consciousness, and lasts as long as they do. When consciousness is extinguished—it's all over. Death is the end of consciousness, nothing more."

But Ljeskovac seemed to follow not merely Miloš's thought, but also his feeling, deliberately concealed, which had struck him as a known certainty in a fraction of a second, namely, that Miloš really did not and could not know what death was and ought in honesty to confess as much. Ljeskovac followed and caught this most intimate thought, and brought out his conclusion aloud. "Death, precisely, is both terrible and a nullity because man—in this case you, Miloš Milošević—cannot know what it is. If man knew what death was, he could, in spite of its inevitability and its terror, do something against it. But he does not know and never will entirely know. And, in particular, you cannot know, being already in the grip of the

fever of death. And you should admit that much after all. But you won't. You dare not."

Miloš was forced to admit to himself: It's terrifying how this Ljeskovac penetrates into my mind, and not only penetrates, but brings my thoughts to light and gives them expression. Where does he get this power? When will he, will he ever, stop?

But Ljeskovac continued to pursue and to tell Miloš's thoughts.

"Like you, I, too, know what death is—in so far as biology, medicine, and law know. But both you and I have a feeling, we know, that death is also something else, something that science will never fathom and that unhappy humans bear secretly about with them and observe in themselves at every moment, so long as they are alive and conscious. Absolute annihilation—the loss even of the feeling of absolute annihilation—that is death in practice and reality for every conscious human being—for you, for me, Commissioner Ljeskovac, whose cigarettes you are taking with unsuccessfully concealed repugnance.

"I believe that with death all is over, I, Commissioner of the Occupying Forces Ljeskovac, who have to kill or save you. Yes, with death all is over. That has even been scientifically proved—the cessation of all thought, whether conscious, unconscious, rational, or intuitive, the end of everything, the absolute annihilation of thought and of the one who dies. You and I know that.

"I do not believe in God either. I, an imperial and royal military commissioner, and you, a student of philosophy in a mutinous occupied country; I am an executioner by duty, and you are made a victim to serve as an example.

"Yes, that's how it is. And we know it. We know that there is no God and no immortality of the soul. Philosophy sometimes distinguishes between the two—God and the

soul—allowing sometimes the existence of the former and the mortality of the latter. But for you and me, the former does not exist and the latter dies with death. The former, to us, is superstition, fear, and bewilderment in the face of the unknown, or, if you prefer, man's need to link himself with eternity, to survive after death—in other words, fear of death. God is fear of death, a flight from it into an invented, imagined immortality. And the so-called soul reduces itself to the human power of knowledge, conscious or intuitive. In fact, there is no soul either; there are only various powers of thought.

“Death is the end of this power. Death is a mystery, not a single gate of which ever has been or ever will be opened, for as we begin to have knowledge of it on the basis of our own experience, we lose the power of acquiring knowledge. Experience and intuition, conscious and subconscious, from which every act of knowledge begins, are extinguished in death even before we are actually, biologically, dead, that is to say, before the process of recognizing death has begun. That is death, from the scientific point of view, or from one of the so-called scientific points of view. A natural law, therefore. But not for those who die. For them death is the negation of a natural law—the destruction of their own living matter, and therefore of all matter, since they are no longer able to conceive any. It manifests itself, to use commonplace language, as the end of all joys and hopes, thoughts and desires, past and future, in one instant of the present which is measureless in the depth of its horror and inconceivable in the length of its duration.

“I cannot spare you that moment. I would like to postpone it. More precisely, I would like to help you now, while you are young and full of vital force, to escape the experience of the hideous endlessness and the hideous inevitability of that moment. It is not possible in any way to

eclipse your knowledge of that endless, inevitable moment once you have come to know exactly when it will happen. One can only achieve that by your knowing that that moment has been indefinitely postponed, namely, by the cancellation of the death sentence.

"I would like to restore you to that life which in all its aspects ceases with death—yes, you and I know that.

"We know for certain that a man lives only so long as he is alive. There is nothing beyond this life, this perception of life in all its various aspects, in a given world and given surroundings.

"Simply and briefly, there is no life after death, my dear fellow!

"Let me offer a few explanations of, so to say, a personal nature.

"You mustn't be surprised at my not crying my atheism from the housetops. Every man lives in a certain definite society, in certain set relations and surroundings, and must up to a certain point conform to the conventions. Nor have you—forgive me, but I know this—unduly stressed your own atheism to the Captain and the old man. That was wise and generous of you: you were careful not to offend their sensibility in a matter of such importance to them, especially in the given circumstances. I, too, act on occasion in the same way: out of duty or consideration, I even go to church. There is nothing insincere or pharisaical about this. I don't take part in any religious service. I don't even celebrate my saint's day, although that, as you know, is today more a Serbian social custom, and a charming one, than a religious rite.

"This too: you believe, I think, that I have come here because I guess—indeed know—what you are going through, so that I may take advantage of your situation and persuade you to make a declaration. That is correct. It is principally my official duty that has brought me here tonight.

But also something else, so far as it is possible to separate this from my official duty. I should like to turn you from your self-abandonment to absolute annihilation, to death—which to me is incomprehensible, inconceivable.

“Even if we cannot reconcile your Serb patriotism and mine, let me say to you in all sincerity that I, too, am a man, even though I am an official of the Austrian occupation.

“My official rôle is no doubt inhuman. I am not to blame for it, at least no more than anyone else. I am duty bound to carry it out conscientiously to the end. You would do the same; you have done and are doing it. It is more important that duty should be done than how it is done—that is the principle of every authority. And I, taking advantage of your moment of weakness, am proceeding exactly on this principle, which may not be very humane, but is inevitable. Allow me tonight to add to this, this ruthless motive in serving and attaining my end, another, human, motive. Strictly speaking, I cannot separate the one from the other, but you are sufficiently intelligent to see which predominates at a given moment and to distinguish between them.

“And so, like you, I know, or, rather, do not know, what death is. For you and me there is no consolation to be found either before or in it. We both know that when we die, we are dead with all that we are, and forever. In the face of the horror of this truth, the grandeur of every idea and ideal grows pale. If as an official I should not, as a man I cannot but do everything in my power to tear you from the embrace of absolute annihilation toward which you are rushing.

“As an official, I have in fact already done my duty—to-day, when I proposed to you with all the subtlety and persuasiveness at my command that you make a declaration. As an official, it is all one to me whether you are hanged

tomorrow or not. The monarchy will not suffer any material loss if you are hanged tomorrow, although I don't dispute that your declaration would be of some momentary benefit within the framework of Montenegrin affairs. But as a man I am profoundly distressed by your fate, and especially by the horror you must face, as I know you do. If you see before you here tonight an Austrian civil commissioner, you should know that there also speaks in him a man, and a man who is horrified by death to the very depths of his being."

Ljeskovac had lost almost every trace of the official. He was agitated, and his eyes were often moist with emotion. He was not dissembling. Although outwardly still the official in his aloofness and his lofty tone, he was also being sincere, profoundly involved in the effort to save Miloš.

But to save him was quite impossible, even if the practical difficulties and contradictions Miloš had already discussed with the Commissioner, his mother and sister, his companions, and, most of all, himself were out of the way. These insurmountable difficulties amounted to this: just as it was impossible to separate the man from the civil commissioner in Ljeskovac, it was impossible to save Miloš without altering the circumstances that had led to his death sentence. These circumstances would not change before morning, and he was bound to submit to them and die or else to give the declaration demanded of him and alter only his own personal position. With this declaration or without it, Serbian-Austrian relations would remain essentially the same—unappeasable hatred and struggle to victory. The removal of obstacles and contradictions amounted, therefore, not to any real change in existing political relations, but to a change of the part he had to play in them. Everything was reduced to his own person—to whether he would or would not remain what he had been before his arrest.

Miloš felt, indeed knew, that this was so, even though it was not yet entirely clear to him. And he rejected Ljeskovac—for the sake of his Serbian patriotism and of the brother he would not and could not betray, despite the fact that his declaration would be powerless to change the circumstances.

Ljeskovac had before him a man who was well aware that he was exhausted to the point of distraction. Miloš's eyes, heavy-lidded and brown by daylight, now shone with a crazy feverishness. The lines around his lips, ordinarily pronounced, were deeply engraved and broken by spasms of twitching, and his tall, slim, well-proportioned body was locked in cramp here on the bed, with his manacled hands thrown around his knees. His low forehead, marked with gentle hollows, wrinkled up and stayed so for a whole minute or two at a time. He rubbed his neck to relieve the pressure of the rope, he stretched it and thrust out his head, as though disengaging himself from the noose. And his head was already tilted to the left, as happens to men who have been hanged.

But Ljeskovac noticed for the first time that he no longer had before him a stubborn dogmatist and fanatic, but a man who realized the transitoriness and the impurity of all ideals, even the Serbian ideal.

The Commissioner and Miloš could not, obviously, agree on what was best for the Serb and the Yugoslav cause, or on the way in which that should be attained. But on the question of ideas there were points of contact between them, and the Commissioner tried to unravel this question, not denying that sacrifice for an idea was also one of the ways of man's existence and very often the sole way in which such existence could realize itself, and, indeed, protect itself.

He grew more specific:

"But what do you contribute by your death to the Idea,

by nature not an absolute, and realizable only in a sordid manner? You may perhaps contribute a little, a very little to the rebellion—the rebellion with whose aims, I know and see, you do not really agree. And then, the moral aspect of the idea—your categorical imperative: a man must act in conformity with his idea, not to say his ‘faith,’ since we are both atheists, although it is clearly a case of something like faith. And this turns out not to be a problem and an obstacle in your case; you are not bound to support by your action—that is to say, by your death—an idea that is not yours—namely, the rebellion of the Montenegrin leaders who are the opponents of your Serb unification.

“And lastly, neither you nor your act are so exceptional that you might be able to have an influence on the realization of your idea. No one will ever know about our bargaining, any more than they will of your deliberate sacrifice. You don’t think that I shall deliver a tirade on your heroic bearing beneath the gallows of the enemy. What can you do publicly tomorrow? Cry out two or three slogans while they are fastening the noose around your neck. The Captain and the old man will do that more loudly and more effectively than you. That’s all. Who will know of the greatness of your sacrifice in a country held down by an army? Who will understand your sacrifice in a country disunited to such a degree that it is only the forces of occupation that prevent it from sinking into a chaos of civil war?”

Ijeskovac was sneering. But that did not matter; it did not even sound offensive. Everything he said would have been accurate, or could have appeared so, if Miloš had been capable of doing what he was asked to do.

“I can’t, I can’t,” Miloš cried, and remembered that he had uttered the same cry to his mother. To his mother and to the Commissioner! In the fact that he had slipped into

using the same words to his mother and to the Commissioner he suddenly saw something terrible. He strained mind and body to reply, to clarify. "I can't submit to the wish of the invader without destroying in myself what I have received from my country and my home. Perhaps my death won't help my idea, but my declaration would help you—and that's the point."

Ljeskovac was angry and pitying. "The words of an insensate chauvinism! It is important that you should not betray your *Ideà* at the cost of saving your own skin. Your conscience may be quiet on that score. Ha, ha, ha! I have used your own word, you understand! And as for the destruction of what you have received from your home—and you don't derive only from that—by your attitude you are doing harm precisely to this home of yours and to its part in yourself. For the rest, nobody, not even yourself, is capable of appreciating these traditional values of yours. Only don't overrate them or hide behind them the other, more real reasons for your attitude.

"Why, why can't you make the declaration? Why are you destroying, blotting out your own personality?"

Miloš caught on to the words "destroy," "blot out," "personality." Here, it seemed to him, lay the core of the whole thing; in any case, it was from this point that one should begin explaining the disagreement between Ljeskovac and himself regarding his own uncontrollable, headlong rush to death.

"Do you understand me, Mr. Commissioner, or, if you prefer it, Mr. Ljeskovac? Now I can take your cigarette—and I do take it—without any inner repugnance. But your proposal for a declaration I reject with a determination that is as strong and final as if it did not in the least depend on me. We disagree on the fundamental point. All our other disagreements stem from that. In consequence, even the points—for example, the point about ideas—on which

you are, or it seems to me that you are, largely right appear as final, irreconcilable disagreements.

"To accept your proposal would mean for me the destruction of my personality, of my moral wholeness, of my core. If I did that, I should cease to be a Serb and a son of my clan and of my country, which is intractable in good and in evil. I say 'my clan and my country' although these are not my ultimates when I choose freely between them and mankind and the human race; but they are everything to me—they are man and mankind and I myself—when I am urged by force to disown them.

"Everything comes down to that destruction of the personality which you mentioned. Everything comes down to the fact that I cannot, I cannot, I have not the strength, to utter a lie and thereby destroy my own personality, the essence of my life. Made up, like every other man, of innumerable elements—and the traditions of my clan and my home stand for something in this—I should cease to be what I am if I were to accept your proposal, since by doing so I should be agreeing to utter a lie deliberately and aloud. And that I cannot, I cannot do!"

The last stone had been wrenched away, and the avalanche came down. The arguments came pouring out of Miloš as soon as he had declared that he could not deliberately and publicly utter a lie. He continued.

"But that doesn't mean that in general I am incapable of telling lies. I know as well as you that politics as such inevitably brings with it the necessity for lying, whether voluntarily or under compulsion. I also know that a policy that is the purest truth, the most unselfish heroism confirmed in action, is bound, in the course of time and with the ascent to power, to turn into a lie and into the art of deliberate lying. And I, too, could and would lie in politics—publicly and deliberately. I would be happy if I could lie in order to deceive you personally—and Austria.

"But this is a question of something else. By the declaration you are asking of me I should not be deceiving you and Austria, but myself. I should have to say deliberately and publicly that I believe in something in which I do not believe, in something I am not—and I cannot do it. There are people who can do even a thing like that. But I'm not one of them. I can't. I can't. If I did such a thing, I should become a different person, someone unfamiliar and repulsive to me—a crawler, soulless, conscienceless, faceless. I should become a living corpse, a corpse walking the earth, conscious of my corruption and my shame. And I have not the strength for that, or, rather, I have too much strength to become that—it all comes to the same thing.

"Utter destruction surrounds and devours me. Utter annihilation. Even its concept is disappearing and the inability to tell a lie and the strength not to tell one. Everything is disappearing.

"But so it is, and it cannot be otherwise. I can only be a corpse, a dead man.

"Perhaps I am inventing an *ad hoc* philosophy to console my inconsolable being, to deceive myself. But if that is so, still it is a reality, irrefutable and insurmountable for me at this moment.

"Every man is the product of his surroundings and of his age, of countless and mysterious circumstances. And I am a Serb from Montenegro and a modern, democratic nationalist. But every man makes over his heritage in his own way. Every man is an individual, and I am a certain Miloš Milošević, irrespective of my being a Serb and a nationalist. This individuality is immutable and indestructible in every man. It is the man himself, that particular man. Every man will yield to compulsion in anything except that which changes his immutable personality. A man has to find himself under special circumstances to find out what is unchangeable in his personality and what it is

that makes him an individual. I can consent to anything except the conscious uttering of a lie. That this is so is little, or hardly at all, to my credit. It just is so and cannot be otherwise. I have inherited it along with other things and digested it my own way: that is my personality. In the same way, Captain Draško will die without hesitation for his son or for Montenegro, and old Vuk is always ready to lay down his life for what he considers to be right. I am perhaps less resolute than they are. But I, too, am unalterable in what I am and in whatever at a given moment ties my personality together into a whole.

"Don't interrupt me! I know what you want to say: 'There's no one element that makes personality, there's no single core to it.' That's so, of course. There's more than a single core; there are perhaps any number of them. They all make up the individual. But at any given moment, depending on the circumstances, one of these centers carries the individuality, represents it, epitomizes it, and will not let it be destroyed, that is to say, changed. I expressed it the moment I rejected your proposal through my inability to tell a conscious lie. Our national resistance is added to it—the determination not to fall in with the wishes of the invader—and all the rest of it.

"As a Serb, I can't and won't allow your force, Austria's force, to master me. To allow that would be to submit to a stranger's will and to admit the impotence of our own national life. We Serbs, those of us who are fighting for independence, are quite capable of destroying ourselves, but not of humbling ourselves. That is what we are like, and that's how it is with us, and always has been. I, as a man, as a person, cannot give way to force and agree to a lie.

"The Serb Idea is perhaps no more than an expression of this other, human, personal stubbornness. If I had been born in the Middle Ages, it would have been faith, or, more likely, heresy; in some future age it would be some-

thing else. But there is something in me that refuses to accept force—this particular force or anything like it, just as in other people there are resistances to pressures of other kinds. Time and circumstance have revealed and roused in me this innermost core, which is beyond time and beyond space and is always taking different forms. For me, here, in this enemy prison, it takes the form of twisting a rope for my own neck, in order not to have to say something I do not believe.

"But what it is—this core—I don't know. It is nameless and indefinite. Something received and something made over by oneself, certainly. Sometimes it's an idea, sometimes love for wife or children, sometimes a passion for learning or the untameable passion of the artist, sometimes a moral standpoint—your categorical imperative. It can be anything you like. A human being in his own way of life. Man does not exist for its sake, since he does not exist for the sake of anything. Yet there it is in human existence and in the existence of every individual.

"One must always have some shore to land on; but that applies only to those who are willing to tell a deliberate lie because this does not affect, does not utterly destroy, their personality. As for myself, I don't know, I can't know, of such a shore. Death has no shores.

"People will always resist force, whether they want to or not. And they will always die, in spite of the measureless fear of death, in the cause of social truth—relative and unideal as it is. Man would not be man if he had not the courage to die.

"Thus annihilation and death are also part of a human existence.

"I am now alive, but I exist through death.

"Perhaps I have not said everything; but I have said enough for us to have done with your proposals. It's a good thing you are here; you will help me to shorten this

interminable, frozen time. For that I am most truly grateful to you."

But Ljeskovac did not regard the conversation about the proposals as finished. Or, as it seemed to Miloš, perhaps he did but the other Ljeskovac did not—for there was another Ljeskovac, the Austrian civil commissioner.

So Ljeskovac continued. "I have listened carefully to you, and I flatter myself that I have done so with patience. It is not the premise of your argument that is wrong, but the conclusion. I, too, do not deny individuality or that personality cannot be changed by force or that it cannot be destroyed. But to realize and express this personality, a man must to his last breath and regardless of all else fight for his existence. You are in fact a dogmatic moralist, since for you human life has an ulterior purpose—the preservation of personality—and not merely the preservation of existence, or, in the final resort, of bare life.

"I do not mean by this that the preservation of one's bare individual existence is the sole and supreme principle. The struggle to preserve one's life is not a principle; it is the precondition for the realization of everything else, even of the idea itself. Everything depends on the circumstances. Sometimes it really is necessary to die so that the life of the nation, the class, the idea, our children, may go on. Your mistake lies in your not really measuring your sacrifice by the advantage that would be gained for the end you wish or feel obliged to attain, but making it secondary to the preservation of the wholeness of your own personality, and, in the last resort, to the preservation of a moral category—the refusal to utter a conscious lie, or, more particularly, something that you do not believe. You are an atheist, yet you are not much different from the heretics of religion, the zealots of the true faith. What, in politics, are falsehood and truth? There is no way of measuring them except by experience, by the confirmation of

practice. In the last resort, falsehood and truth in politics are only one or the other in so far as they are successful or unsuccessful. There are no other ways of measuring them in politics, since it is not a question of scientific truths, but of something that is just as much subject to the passions or needs of the moment as to objective laws.

“And what is it you are doing? You are taking a moral category—the refusal to tell a lie—and transferring it to a sphere in which it only applies relatively and to the extent to which something—in this case, your sacrifice—actually assists some cause. And what will you help by your sacrifice, and to what extent? You yourself admit the doubtful value and the nullity of this sacrifice so far as the Serb cause is concerned, certainly in the form in which you conceive it. Thus you admit the relative character of all morals and of all ideas and truths, of course excepting the laws of science. Also, your theory of the core of personality is nothing but an abstract defense of morality as an absolute, universally valid category in politics. I won’t say that there is no such thing as an essential core of personality, although its exact definition is dubious, and you yourself say that this core is always taking different forms and that there are any number of them, even within the same individual. But if it is as you say, then the same question has to be put here as in the case of morality: What is individuality, what is its preservation, if they do not serve to secure a concrete advantage for men in general, or even for oneself?

“And what are you securing by your sacrifice? You are preserving an abstract, ever-changing integrity. Natural laws are unchanging even though they express themselves in constantly differing material forms. Man discovers them as absolutes, that is to say, irrespective of the forms and relationships in which they may manifest themselves. Man is able to do this and is bound to do it because this is one

of his characteristics. A thing either is or is not discovered once and for all; otherwise it is, at best, good philosophy—provisional truth, a reminiscence. But man discovers that social laws are relative and probable, at best, valid only for today and probable for tomorrow and the future. Social truth is the discovery of an emerging social form, of an existing social reality—the definition of the action of a given social group. Morality, personality, ideas are subject to the possibilities inherent in this action and spring from them.

“You, in fact, disregard form and potentiality and treat individuality and morality as absolutes, even though you admit their variable nature and make them dependent on circumstances. I am no philosopher, except in so far as a lawyer has to be one. But you will admit that my conclusion is logical: by obliterating your personality, you are merely securing a purely personal satisfaction in having saved that same personality from destruction! And that is all. It is absurd. It is inhuman. It means the loss of every real standard by which one could measure the value of such an irremediable, absolute sacrifice. At times it resembles vain obstinacy.

“Confess, you have no such standard!”

“Indeed I have not, Mr. Commissioner. A standard is something rational. But here it is a case of an inner resistance that is as much instinctive as conscious. Some might call it faith in victory, others national or some other sort of consciousness, others conscience. Perhaps it contains something of all of these and of much else besides. In me it manifests itself as a resistance to falsehood. And behind this there seems to me to stand a refusal to bow to force. It is the instinctive desire of my own personality, as it is the desire of everything human—every community, every thought and action—to maintain and to extend the conditions of its own existence. My people, too, want to survive and live, bleeding from every vein today, as they will multi-

ply in peace tomorrow under parliamentary rule. Thanks to the trend of events and to you, the occupying forces, death has become for me the sole way of life. It's absurd—but it's logical because it is inevitable.

"In one way you are right: my resistance leads to no tangible end. And yet it draws me on with the force of a natural law—blindly, relentlessly. I cannot, I will not, do anything to make life easy for Austria, because Austria is hacking at the roots of my country's life. It is doing this in pursuit of ideals that may be great and noble, but for us what is at stake is life, being, existence. And for me what is at stake is life, which cannot be had except by death.

"Standards! The man who measures does not give, does not sacrifice himself. It is those who drive people to death who calculate. The future is the only measure that will tell who has been a fool and who farsighted. My duty is not to betray myself. There is no measure for the immeasurable, for the things in which passion and chance play an inescapable part. I cannot measure the significance of my own death, which is bound to come, but I can measure my life while it goes on. Everything that is mine will die, I know that; but I am alive now and I shall go on living to the end if I do not give in. If I had given in to you and to Austria, to force, I would have ceased to exist. I would have destroyed myself in that very moment, before my physical death. Yet I want to live, I would rather live; but I can only live by remaining myself.

"Maybe someone, somewhere, will say: 'He died honorably.' That perhaps will not have much meaning in time to come; but today, for me, it is everything.

"I don't know whether, or how much, my death will help my country's struggle, but I am sure that I shall remain clean in my own eyes and before the laws of my own personality—by my own categorical imperative, if you like."

Ljeskovac grew troubled, even spiteful. He rose and looked around; the room was too small for him to walk about. The huge man completely filled it, blotted out the whole room. There was no space, no air.

"It's a myth! You are turning your death into a myth!"

"Why not, Commissioner? A myth is something that really happened or that people passionately wished to happen which was transformed into an idea or a poem. My poem, and my idea, is—my death."

"Do you realize that you have no children, that you will have no posterity?"

"No, I have no children. My unborn children grieve me at this time as much as seeing my born children die would. But my children will not be ashamed of me."

"There speaks in you, my poor fellow—you really deserve to be addressed in this way—the primitive Montenegrin peasant, the atavism of the man from the blood tribe. You're soaked in the ideology of Serb chauvinism. The whole of it is embodied in one pigheaded, self-centered personality."

"And why should that be a bad thing, Commissioner? The Montenegrins, Mr. Commissioner, were the spark that fired the Serb Idea. From their agony and their struggle a principle was born—the fight against evil, the feeling for humanity, Njegoš, Miljanov, Daković. Evil still goes on. Today it is you—Austria-Hungary. Tomorrow it will be someone else, in some other way. And the fight against it will go on, too, in another way. The fight never stops. A Serb fanatic, a chauvinist, with a deadly love for my trampled, scattered people—very well, let me be that, only that. The faith is not important, but how it came to be and where it leads to.

"And I prefer myself as I am, irrational, insanely obstinate."

Ljeskovac laughed. Miloš felt that the Commissioner

laughed not at him but at an exhausted, agitated human being. Ljeskovac was mocking his having started a new theme, though he himself did the same.

"The fight against evil—a new theme and a new dogma," he said. "But what is evil? I know, you will say: That which prevents human beings from having human living conditions—Austria-Hungary, which opposes Serb chauvinism. Austria, order and civilization, civility—evil! What is evil? What is good to you is evil to me! What is evil?"

Miloš saw clearly that a new question was being thrown to him, to the intelligence of an exhausted prisoner, to a creature torn apart by the terror of death—and a hard question, which loomed larger and larger. He, Miloš, was not capable of answering it. Yet the old man knew what evil was. The old man should have been asked. But that other self—the intelligent prisoner—must answer, must answer because of himself and to himself, rather than to satisfy Ljeskovac's incurious curiosity. So he answered, debating with himself as well as with Ljeskovac; sometimes it was one Miloš who spoke, sometimes the other, or both spoke at the same time, making no distinction between what one cried aloud and what the other said to himself, or even sometimes what Ljeskovac said.

Evil, evil, I must think it over. I can't think it over. And why do I have to think about it at all?

Ha, ha! Ha, ha, ha! You don't know, you can't. Evil's laughing at you, victorious evil.

Hey, evil, do you think you're going to win? Mother said: "Keep your soul." What was she thinking of? What was the old man thinking of? What would the old man say now?

What is evil? Evil is the annihilation of human life. Ha, ha! So your refusal to make the declaration is evil.

No, evil is not only that. I don't know. One thing I do know; you, Austria, you are evil.

That is just a personal hatred. Philosophy, objectivity, are on my side.

You are evil, because you are annihilating a new life.

Why new? It's enough to say life.

Because you are death.

The old man would say: The destruction by force of anything human—that is evil.

And are you not using force against Austria-Hungary? Isn't that evil?

Yes, that is evil, too. Evil against evil—no other way is possible. Perhaps there is no good. Good is evil against evil, life against force, faith against death.

Again, the absence of a standard. How do you measure, how do you define evil? The source of all your wisdom is guessing at the meaning of the proverbs of the wise man from Rovci. And who is he to know what evil is! His whole life he has been up to the neck in evil.

But he is an old man. He knows!

Ha, ha! He knows because he is an old man.

He knows, not because he is old, but because what he knows he has inherited from somewhere and has got from his own long experience. He would say: When you do to someone what you would not like him to do to you—that is evil. Who asked you to come to our country?

A purely Christian definition!

But I am an atheist.

A pretty sort of atheist! Religious definitions.

What matter if they are religious, if they are true—if they are not evil?

And this, too, the old man would say: A man, if he is a man, must fight against evil, even with evil; against death, even with death.

Muddled, not clear.

It can't be clearer.

Why not?

How fine and pleasant it would be if all this could be more clearly expressed—it would be as if there were no such thing as death.

Death does not yield to death, but to the preservation, the triumph of life.

But death is evil.

Death is neither good nor evil. What is death? What is evil?

I do not know. But the old man knows. People know without any philosophy what evil is, just as they know what air they breathe. Death is evil; or, more accurately, more clearly, evil is death.

You are death. You are evil. You, Austria, the faceless official. I hate you, I hate evil.

I, of course, hate you. I hate you irrespective of good and evil, beyond good and evil, because you are a selfish, self-satisfied being against the state, chaos against order, the savage against civilization. There is no good and evil, my Montenegrin scholar. There is only the will to live, and this is achieved only by conquering others—the will to power.

That means you wanted to conquer me?

Keep your soul.

Death is evil—evil is death.

But I will not give in to force. I won't, I can't give way. What is power, then, the will to power? Barren force, evil, death.

It's day already. You've worn me out, you wretch. You've worn us both out, my man of learning.

You wanted to trample on me, to take advantage of my bewilderment in the face of extinction. But it's really you who are bewildered. It's day and you've forgotten to put out the lamp. Ha, ha! Force turns to impotence in the face of spirit; order turns to chaos in the face of humanity.

What do you know, what can you know, faced with the eternity of nothingness?

I know something now. Or, to be exact, I do not know—I'm tired and I haven't time to prove it, but I've reached agreement with myself on it—and I shall carry it away with me: the most important thing is to preserve in oneself the supremacy of the human, that ever-changing core—spirit, soul, the resistance to force and death and evil. That is human life, unique and indestructible.

All this is merely the intoxication of death in you—typical of all fanatics and dogmatists, and of major criminals, too, deprived of all conscience.

Perhaps. If . . . Perhaps conscience does exist. Perhaps it does not. But it's important to be one's own master, even if drunk with death.

Am I drunk with life? It's the last time.

Really it's as if I myself do not know what I am saying. You talk like a man drunk with insanity and fear.

No, it is that other me talking.

Madness. There is no other you, only you and I. Who are you talking to?

To you, Ljeskovac.

And to yourself.

Yes, and to the me who is afraid of death.

Morbid, muddled.

Death, evil. But the core is sound, against death, against evil.

I didn't mean to torture you. It turned out this way because of your inflexibility, your shortsightedness. As a man, I wished you well.

Ah well, it's all one now. I can even forgive—as a man. But what sort of man are you? Austria? Well, I forgive Austria, too. I have remained what I am. I no longer hate. Is there any pain left?

Ljeskovac was out of the room. The boards no longer creaked under his weight. The room was spacious and full of the early sun. But Miloš went on talking—to Ljeskovac or to his other self.

If you had left me in peace, I should not have known all this—if I do know anything at all. Well, it's not a great discovery and I could not tell it to anybody. Still, it's a comfort—if there can be comfort under the gallows.

But perhaps—I made this discovery only for the sake of having comfort at the end? No, that's the other man talking from inside me, Ljeskovac!

I've found it, I've found it!

Everyone who looks, who does not allow inhumanity to kill the humanity in him, finds comfort before death and becomes drunk with it. I remember a man from Lika who died quietly and calmly on the gallows. What else could he, an army deserter and a Serb at that, expect from victorious Austria-Hungary and its flawless administration? What else could he do in a strange part of the country, with none of his own folk about him, in the middle of ranks of foreign soldiers, but grit his teeth and harden his heart and die without fuss, honorably? Another man had killed, robbed, used violence—and he went with riot and song to the gallows. The old man said about him: "He is singing, he is chasing away fear, but that, too, takes strength—and a man. He leaves no emptiness or grief behind him."

It was so important to me, and to the other two, just how we should die. Yet we knew how the man from Lika and the other were hung.

Another memory: The Austrian Army, oddly enough, has no professional hangmen, so the execution was carried out by ordinary soldiers under the direction of doctors. They tied their limbs at several points, carefully, slowly, and with the arms down the side. But the Lika man's rope broke—it was a wartime product; there was paper in the

hemp. As he rolled on the ground, he shouted: "God's truth!" They doubled the rope and hung him again. After that the soldiers swung them to and fro, passing them to each other—to give themselves the least possible trouble. It was all done as if they took pleasure in these deaths. They swaddled them like babies and played with them as on a seesaw.

But now the way we are killed seems to me unimportant. What is more important than the manner of execution and the death itself is how the condemned man dies.

There are those who die yelling or shouting the names of abstract realities, such as the Fatherland, Freedom, or the name of the leader. There are those who die silently and seriously—like the man from Lika—or with passionate hatred—like the other man. One must choose one's own way. That's important. That carries one along and intoxicates one. It's a form of intoxication, intoxication with good and evil.

Long live the Serbs! Down with Austria!

I shall make myself drunk, too. I shall hardly feel the bodily pain, the clutch and bite of the rope. It's not the real me, but the other Miloš, who is scared of death.

Who is scared of death?

Who is not?

The core is sound.

But Mother said . . . and the old man said . . .

Mother—the old man.

21

With the coming of the sun he was returned to his two friends.

They were glad to see him, and he them.

They had had no fear that the Austrians might get the

better of him; but they wanted to die together. Yesterday they did not care one way or the other. Today the act of dying seemed easier if they were not separated.

Even so, none of them noticed in what kind of a common, joint event they were taking such pleasure. The Captain did say, it is true: "I'm glad we shall die together"; to which the old man added: "Since it has come to that." But this was more an assertion of fact than a perception, an admission, that they were all three together united by the gallows.

Being together—that was what gave them joy; but that could not be reconciled with the gallows.

Time became divided into ever shorter and, at the same time, more perceptible and therefore more protracted stretches. If they waited for a given thing to happen, it appeared to be slipping away from them, since something else would always be intercepting. And even when the expected thing at last did arrive, it was merely in the form of a postponement of something else that ought to have been happening at that moment. Through their eyes and ears they observed this ever more stubborn dragging of time, and could not keep themselves from defining it. "Time drags on," said the Captain. "It's one interminable wait," said Miloš. And the old man said: "Nothing takes so long as death."

But there was also another time, which did not fall into divisions and in which nothing happened. Neither the senses nor the reason took note of it, and it dwindled like lightning, with an irresistible terror that grew every minute nearer and more intense. Contradictions and distinctions between this unmeasurable, uniform, yet ever shortening time and that other ever lengthening time seemed to be disappearing. Miloš was not in the least surprised when the old man, shortly after he had commented about the long wait for death, and having thirstily emptied the blue

glazed mug of water, declared: "Nothing comes quicker than death." He himself had come to much the same conclusion, having noticed that the rays of the sun had already reached the middle of the grating; he had begun to learn the old man's method of reading the time. "The sun's going slower and slower—and quicker and quicker." And the Captain paced up and down the cell as desperately as if he were spurring himself on.

Miloš noticed further that the two others were falling swiftly and completely into a kind of ecstasy. They themselves obviously did not notice this, and they went with extreme sobriety about their morning routine, the old man cleaning up the room, and the Captain folding the bedding. But these jobs were done much too conscientiously and deliberately, and were clearly designed to kill time and afford a refuge from something dreadful. Words poured from them more and more unrestrainedly. The old man cursed Austria, the Captain hissed at the Fritzes, and both lamented Montenegro. And each of them was struck less often but more and more acutely by the thought of his own personal tragedy. The Captain cried words of grief about his son, about his home and lands, and the old man sighed longer and deeper than before.

Seeing his companions in this ecstasy, which was, it was obvious, consciously encouraged by them, Miloš thought that the same thing was taking place in himself, but perhaps not to the same extent. He was shocked when the Captain said to him: "It's quite useless your getting upset at the Fritzes for using force, and it's quite useless your longing for Serb unity." He was still more staggered by the old man saying: "Hold out just a little longer and you'll trample down this trouble."

Hatred of force, interweaving and identifying itself with love for the Serb and Yugoslav cause, must then have taken possession of him, as it had of his friends. And he kept

hearing uncontrolled, burning words bursting out of him. Suddenly it all seemed clear to him without proof or careful thought—Austria would collapse, and the Serbian cause would win. And words and thoughts, words that were thoughts, were liable at any moment to turn into a cry of exultant defiance and to soar above the growing chill, the spreading embrace, of annihilation.

This ecstasy could not be reinforced by any deliberate action. His companions, and he himself, did indeed make efforts to this end more and more frantically, although there was not the least need for it. The ecstasy grew with every moment. The stream of words grew more and more tempestuous, the proofs of Austrian wickedness, violence, and injustice more forceful and endless. It was pleasing to see, to note, to handle these accumulated proofs of villainy, more and more of them, as denunciation grew harsher and harsher and more and more exultant. To sacrifice oneself for truth and freedom seemed ever more justifiable and finer—even though the fear of death mounted more and more sharply and time dragged on with more events happening and grew shorter by its own action.

The adversary grew more impersonal. All the men like Ungri and Ljeskovac were vanishing, with their maneuvers, their petty malice, and their suspect good intentions. Austria was vanishing. Even the Serbs and Montenegro, the family, the children, and the clan. Even love and hate were withering away.

What grew in fiery clarity was the idea of good and evil, conceived by each of them after his own fashion; and to each of them the idea of annihilation appeared more and more ghastly in exactly the same way.

Save yourself—don't give in to force!

Man is stronger than evil!

Every injustice has an end!

Death is utter annihilation!

If you are no longer there, things can still go on without you.

There is no life after death.

But with all this they did exactly what they would otherwise have been doing: they smoked, talked, ate, and drank; they even took an interest in what was going on around them.

The prison faced the street, and from early morning the Captain and the old man had heard the crunching of the gravel beneath the feet of passers-by and occasionally of horses. But for a long time now—ever since Miloš had noticed the sunbeams on the middle of the grill—there had reigned an uncanny, and, for market day, an unaccustomed, silence. There was no hum of voices; there were no street-sellers' cries. No children were at play; not a dog was to be heard. Silence lay, too, over the prison yard, which was full of soldiers. There was no sound of the crisp tap of arms or boots.

The silence, at last, communicated itself to the three prisoners as well. Their faces said: It will be soon. It will be now.

The old man looked at the window but did not get as far as telling the time. The cross-pattern of commands and footsteps quickly transferred itself from the courtyard to the corridor, and the noise of the lock cut sharply into it. At the door stood Ljeskovac and Father Mirko, both pale, sleepless, and, it seemed to Miloš, more agitated than they, the prisoners.

The priest asked: "Are you ready?" And Ljeskovac: "Is there anything more you want?" They ought to have asked their questions the other way around, Miloš thought; it looked as if Mirko, a friend and one of their own people, were hurrying them, while Ljeskovac, a foreigner and an enemy, was offering them his services.

The prisoners said nothing; they had nothing to get

ready, unless the priest were thinking of some sort of spiritual preparation, and that was over, and, in any case, knows no end. As for wishes, the old man put in: "If they could shave us—it's not right to go to the other world like this." Miloš smiled; the old man was imagining that his soul would be transported to heaven and that he would emerge into the presence of God and his archangels and the elect just as he was. The Captain supported the old man. "I shouldn't like to appear unshaven before the people." Miloš agreed. "One certainly looks better shaved."

They waited for the barber in a long, strained silence. When he came, they all began to talk in whispers—about everything except what was to come.

The barber's hands shook to begin with. He did not look the prisoners in the eye; he scarcely looked at their faces.

They all saw and felt in themselves the duration of every stroke of the razor. But for them, engrossed, the shaving shortened the time, dwindling steadily by its own action.

That, too, came to an end.

But there was still a further wait, in the corridor. Since the barber was there, Ljeskovac, too, had a shave, having failed to shave himself, probably because of his preoccupation with the arrangements for the hanging. But this did not last long, and the prisoners made the best of it. Miloš walked about and combed his hair with spread fingers. The Captain adjusted his jacket and regretted that he had not ordered his boots to be brought from home, but was wearing peasant sandals, as if he were off to the fields. The old man went back into the cell; he arranged the already made bed, lined up the crockery, and then took his cape, folded it, and threw it carefully over his shoulders, as if he were making ready to follow the cattle.

They were taken at last into the courtyard full of sol-

diers—two double ranks of them beneath the sun and the translucent mountain sky.

While they were being tied, they were dazzled by the glare of the sun. Unintentionally, Miloš was put in the middle, but he got out of place, and the middle position fell to old Vuk Rovčanin. The guards tied his right hand to Miloš's left and his left to the Captain's right. But the old man did not forget to tuck the ends of his cape under his belt before they did this, so it would not fall off his shoulders. Miloš noticed his friends' pallor and tense calm and the guards' paleness and disquiet.

The gate opened wide. One double file of soldiers went out, then a second, and they lined the street. The prisoners would walk between them.

There were words of command in a foreign tongue. Everything froze. There was the beating of drums, and, as if in response to it, the bell in the church above the town began to toll mournfully.

Captain Draško asked himself and the others: "Dare they still toll the bells?"

Miloš could not be sure that he did not say aloud: "We're going to our own funeral."

And the old man pulled the others to the gate. "Let's go, children."

THE END

As soon as he had mounted his horse and tightened rein, the image of Šemsa rose up before him, of her plump body always a little sweaty, tough, smelling of the stables and the hayloft. He could see no connection between Šemsa and the jaunting of the horse through the grassy, woody countryside. Without touching the ground, the horse seemed to be carrying him on through the yellow and green of early autumn just as some unknown force in the blue sky above him was lightly bearing away the clouds, which would never again return. But Šemsa, with her warm, compliant body, suddenly began squeezing his hands with a tender pressure, stretching his limbs, blinding his eyes with dark intoxicating waves, so that he felt as if he were moving in a dream.

He thought: Perhaps I shall never return to Šemsa again. But what is this Šemsa all about? Who is she? Nobody and nothing—a servant woman, a Turk! But she's sweet, God damn her! Still, I wouldn't be the man I am—Boško Simović, a hero from a house of heroes—if I didn't go to their town simply because they are spreading the tale around and boasting that I won't come because I haven't the guts. Come along, Alat, my old fellow, hurry a little; we've a long way to go—four full hours, if we're to get there before midday, when the market is busiest, and if we're to move around the market place—let both districts and both borders see us, let Blagota Bojović and his sneaks and informers stop lying and hinting about how they put the fear of God into us and telling every sort of dirty tale against us.

As if he had understood his master's wishes—or so it seemed to his master—Alat, snorting and prancing, quickly outdistanced Boško's two companions with short skipping steps, so that for a time they were obliged to put their

horses to a trot in order not to be left too far behind. Their journey was not without its dangers, with both Montenegrin and Moslem rebels in the mountains. The warm weather and green leafage still kept them out of their hiding places and tempted them to retaliatory raids.

And although Boško was surprised, pleasantly, of course, by the memory of Šemsa that had come over him as he mounted his horse and stepped out into the pale, sweet-smelling morning, the thought of his wife, from whom he had parted not long ago, came before him quite naturally and as a matter of course. And it had always been that way: as soon as he thought about Šemsa, his mistress, the form of his wife, Jovana, gaunt and prematurely aged, inevitably rose up next to her. Usually he managed to banish this form without much difficulty, drowning it in passionate dreams of Šemsa. Today there was no need of that: his wife, anxious and silent, just as she had been this morning while following his every movement, stood beside Šemsa, unobtrusive, even beloved and welcome.

Yes, he concluded, one could live and continue to live with both Šemsa and Jovana—if only it were not for that quarrel with Blagota and his faction. But who knows, who can tell, what that quarrel might lead to? Haven't I, only this morning, though ready to make my peace with Blagota, set out to defy him? And didn't I stick two revolvers in my belt? If one misses, the other won't!

To his sons—two were studying in Belgrade, and the third was already in service as a young lawyer's clerk—Boško gave hardly a thought. They had already separated from him and were living their own lives, neither comprehending nor, what was worse, wanting to comprehend his life. They came home as guests for vacations and left again in the same way. He loved them, certainly, and saved for them and still supported two of them; but the life he lived—especially his life with Šemsa—was out of their reach, not

merely because he was careful to conceal it, but because they, he was absolutely certain, were unable to understand him. What did they care for the farm he had bought and expanded in Sandžak, a predominantly Moslem country the Montenegrins had conquered in 1912? Money thrown away, they thought, and a series of headaches. They were not making ready to live in the country and work the land! And Šemsa now—which one of them could understand and forgive Boško's infidelity to their mother, let alone imagine that terrible, irresistible masculine craving which even Boško had not suspected in himself until he was approaching his fiftieth year?

Over Šemsa, over the farm, and over political quarrels and disputes, his sons, who had once been his own body and breath, had parted company with him and had grown to be a separate world, parallel with his own, a world to which he would hand on the inheritance and his name, and his own continuation into posterity, but they would have their own way of life, which was already incompatible with his. Alat stumbled crossing a brook, and Boško shouted at him: "Curse on you!" Then he lightly dismissed the thought of his sons which was weighing on his mind. "Everything I make is for them, everything I do is to give them a higher standing, but I, too, have got to live while I'm alive and have got to butt my way through life."

But since that morning Šemsa had got deep into him in a strange way: he felt her inside him as an agreeable kind of tension, even when he was not actually thinking of her. Her presence grew stronger as he drew away from his own district headquarters and nearer to that of Blagota, as the solution of his dispute with Blagota became less clear and his own truculence became more fiery and deliberate. Even if he had wanted to, it was now impossible for him to return until he had spent some time, were it a day or an hour, in Blagota's territory. Otherwise, what would his com-

panions think of him, and the clerks and officials of his own district who knew where he was off to? What would the Montenegrin settlers think? There would be plenty of those who could not wait to interpret his lack of defiance as cowardice. What had kept him the head man of the district was his reputation among the Montenegrins—a resolute spirit and a famous name, and not education or ability. And this district of his, which had been created after the war to help push back the Moslems and settle Montenegrins, was turning out to have been a temporary expedient now that conditions were beginning to be normal, an artificial creation which depended more on Boško's personal connections than on administrative needs. In addition, what had most taken Boško aback, and had even angered and offended him, was that, although the deputy whom he had supported for election to the provincial government had been returned and his party was in power, he had received orders from the government, and even from the ministry, to settle his dispute with Blagota Bojović, because it was creating strained relations between their respective districts and hampering communications and the prosecution of lawbreakers. This was the ostensible reason, at any rate, for Blagota's trip to Boško's district. The real reason was to defy his adversary's statements that he would not dare come.

This morning Boško was maddened by an incomprehensible connection between Šemsa—the Šemsa inside him—and the dispute with Blagota, which had grown more and more violent and uncontrollable. It's as if I were going to a duel with Blagota over Šemsa, he thought. He lost his temper and drove Alat on, paying no attention to his companions, who could hardly keep up with him, and without a thought for enemies in ambush, who had an infinite choice of places where they could lie in wait for him.

Despite the dangers, he had brought with him only two

policemen—Naso Kaljić and his kinsman Milić. Although he had decided suddenly to make for his adversary's home ground, he had chosen these two men on purpose, knowing that both of them, each in his way, were ready to die for him.

Naso belonged to a famous Moslem clan which had long fought bloodily with the Montenegrins along the Tara. His grandfather and father had distinguished themselves in both the borderlands as leaders of bands against the Montenegrins. But that had not prevented his being loyal to his new infidel masters; to be loyal when once one had entered somebody's service was an unwritten law in his clan, all the more so in this case because Boško had saved his father from Montenegrin reprisals. On the entreaty of his father, once a wealthy cattle breeder ruined by wars and raids, Naso had been admitted to the service, and this bound him to change his hereditary allegiance for personal devotion to his superior officer. Coming from a family of fine horsemen, he was knowledgeable about horses; in addition, and Boško particularly appreciated this, he was a tall, fair-haired man, a thoroughbred, with a frank look.

The other escort, Boško's kinsman Milić, had acquired some land near the county headquarters and had then taken on certain duties in his kinsman's service. His look of a bird of prey would have seemed fierce and gloomy even if he had not been notorious as a man who dealt in murky affairs. Boško's service—fighting with rebels, driving out Moslems—required men who were unsociable, harsh, and full of guile. Milić was a man of this kind. Taciturn and inscrutable, he liked nobody, not even Naso. To him, the other was a Turk—someone with whom the deadly struggle was not yet at an end. Nevertheless, he accepted him, as he did everything else his kinsman and chief ordered.

A half-peasant himself, and without any of the habits of a senior bureaucrat, Boško was direct, almost familiar, with

his subordinates, and his relations with Naso and Milić had a touch of particular intimacy, the kind of common feeling and understanding, with few words spoken, that is to be found among men who deal with confidential matters and which establishes itself between them without regard to differences in rank or anything else.

But this morning Boško avoided all conversation with them on the road and intentionally evaded them. He wanted to be alone with himself.

2 ~

We have fought and won new land, but we have not found peace for ourselves, he wound up his old train of thought, as he pushed hastily on toward Blagota's headquarters.

They had been fellow fighters, one might even say friends, Blagota and he, and they had shared like brothers, if not much good fortune, still a good deal of ill. They had known each other from earlier days, but had become close as prisoners in Boldagason's camp, where each had saved the other's life, honor, and hope by sharing their last mouthful and their last cigarette and by agitating for the union of Montenegro and Serbia among the other prisoners. This intimacy had continued after their return from captivity: Blagota had been appointed head and Boško chief of police in the same district. There they had joined in suppressing the rebel and separatist movement and had helped each other to revive lives that had been shattered by the war. And when, with the whip and by ambushes, by arrests, and by burnings, they had firmly established the new government in their home country, they had been appointed heads of the two administrative districts bordering Montenegro, to carry out the same task from a somewhat

different angle—the squeezing out of the Moslem population.

Boško's district contained no towns, and was, in the main, so shaped as to make it easier for the Montenegrins to penetrate the Moslem villages outside of the administrative authorities of the towns. At the outset Boško had given proof of adaptability and vigor. As in Montenegro itself, this task was, to all intents and purposes, a continuation and consummation of the war.

But circumstances quickly changed.

The Moslem party in Belgrade grew steadily in importance in the rivalries between the Serbian parties. It was now openly working for the abolition of Boško's district and for a halt to further Montenegrin penetration. To this end it was supporting in the neighboring district the former parliamentary deputy, Tomo Djukić, and the district head, Blagota Bojović, Boško's friend and fellow fighter from the days of the bloody and violent unification of Montenegro and Serbia. In short, at the elections both districts were rolled into one, and Tomo Djukić, to secure the Moslem vote, bowed to the wishes of the Moslem leaders for the abolition of Boško's district. Blagota gave him his support in the hope that Tomo would help in his promotion and transfer to a bigger and more civilized town.

It was in this way and from this time that the quarrel between Boško and Blagota began.

But this quarrel was neither the single cause nor the only pattern of their disagreement—new causes and new irritants multiplied daily in the most unlooked-for and most distorted forms. Had not Blagota expelled Boško's eldest son from the district headquarters in which he had started his career? And had not Boško in his own district blocked Blagota's piecemeal purchase of the lands of Moslem landlords by the road? And how ruthlessly he had done it! Even now, on his way to Blagota's headquarters,

the only justification he could find for it in his own mind was that Blagota, on his side, had used no gentler methods against him. Boško had prevented an agreement by letting it be known to one Moslem that he would chew him up in little pieces if he were to attempt to sell his property to Blagota. The Moslems in general, so this beg too, had reason to take such threats seriously, particularly in Boško's district. Even today, three years after the establishment of the new state, Moslems were being killed in secret and by ambush, and the offenders were never detected.

Although Boško had found it easy to frighten the beg, violence and fear had not been the only, and possibly not the most important, reason why the Moslems were selling their land at rock-bottom prices and emigrating, mostly to Turkey. There was, besides, their hereditary intolerance toward another religion, and, more especially, their inability to reconcile themselves to the fact that infidels who for centuries had been their serfs had now become their masters. With Turkey, the Moslems had no real links, as they well knew, particularly since Kemal Pasha had begun to introduce a European civil order; but there was no alien religion there and none of their recent serf laborers to lord it over them. Their time was over, and destiny's revenge was being executed on them. This both Montenegrins and Moslems believed and felt, especially in the regions where they lived intermingled. The squeezing out of the Moslems from the valleys of the Tara and the Lim, which had begun in the middle of the nineteenth century, had never been interrupted, even in time of peace, but had gone on in the form of irregular warfare, in risings and attacks. Only the small traders and the poor held on in the towns, less concerned about who the ruling authority was than about wages and amenities. But in the towns they were protected against naked force. The countryfolk, who

were more exposed and also more fatalistic, were seized with a longing to emigrate, which was all the stronger the better off they were or the less they were used to working on the land—the begs, the agas, the men of property.

Though Boško had blocked Blagota's deal, he himself had profited by the decline and the fall in price of Moslem properties and had bought a fine estate not far from his district headquarters, with gardens and fields grouped around a house, meadows lying by the river, and copses and woods on either side of them. Only the house was not as he wanted it; it was no more than a tower of already rotting timber, although it was still possible to live in it. This estate had given Djukić and Blagota occasion to brand Boško publicly as a highhanded plunderer of Moslem properties. He had answered them in the same strain: that Djukić had embezzled the regimental funds during the retreat of the Serbian Army, and that Blagota, though it was not possible to charge him with crooked dealing or with blackmail, was such an indiscriminate womanizer that, while they were serving in the same place, Boško, as chief of police, had had to extricate him more than once from embarrassing disputes with the husbands and relatives of women whom he had gone after. Boško profited by this, too, calling him a skirt-lifter and stressing, even at this very moment, on the road and to himself and not without some regret, the difference in age between Blagota and himself: I'm twelve years older. How many times have I hauled him out of the dirt, like an elder brother, with advice and a good dressing down?

From the mark of hatred, rivalry, and party incitement, especially since Boško had linked himself with Tomo's opponent, the quarrel between Boško and Blagota had gone on spreading and rooting itself more and more deeply, stirring up strife even within clans and, more particularly, individual passions and sensibilities. They

were not themselves the kind of disputants who think of each other in contemptuous terms or hurl abusive nicknames; but all kinds of petty agitators did this on their behalf. And the two of them brought into it, with increased intensity, the vehemence and roughness characteristic of people proud by heritage and sensitive on the point of honor.

"Am I my father's son and my grandfather's grandson?" Boško asked himself and others. "Did they, by sword and bridal, build up our honor and our name so that I might now allow some fellow to drag it in the dirt? I don't live only by what I have won myself, but also by what my forefathers have left me. They did not leave behind them houses and heirlooms, but high regard and an honorable name—and these are my food and drink and the sun that warms me from within. What more can I win and get? Younger and cleverer men than I am will shove me aside any day now as an old blockhead. But there's one thing I can keep, and time cannot trample or crush it—my honor and my name."

3

It cannot be said that Boško, and Blagota, too, after his fashion, did not really possess this honor and pride; but these had acquired for him, for both of them, an overwhelming, a fateful importance, in an age and in a way of life in which they felt more and more lost. Looking back, it seemed to Boško that at the very time they had felt closest to each other, when they were jointly suppressing resistance to the union, the causes of their separation and ill will were already latent in them, real and beginning to grow even though they were as yet invisible and impossible to prove.

With the collapse of Austria-Hungary, the possibility of union with Serbia was placed more squarely before Montenegro because the leading figures of the old order, King Nikola and his government, were still in exile and their opponents were supported by the Serbian Army, which, though insignificant in numbers, was still victorious. Montenegro had drifted toward a civil war, which was a squaring of accounts not only between the opponents and the partisans of union, but also between an absolute monarch and leading families who could not accept the position of vassals and parliamentary democrats and capitalists who longed to become vassals. The two opposing parties were given nicknames from the color of the leaflets with which they proclaimed themselves at the elections—the Whites and the Greens, the supporters and the opponents, respectively, of union. Their programs were highly simplified and reduced in fact to the two colors—for or against union—as commonly happens when all other means of argument have run out but bare force. The Greens were united solely in a desire for the separate existence of Montenegro, but even in this they were not entirely constant, being inclined to consider other solutions, such as federation, and not independence alone; and many of them were susceptible to bribery and to promises of pensions. The Whites were unanimous and unyielding on the basic question of union, and therefore the more aggressive. There was not, and could not be, any free exchange of views in the conditions of suppressed civil war, and it would have been difficult to conclude that the Whites had a majority behind them. Nevertheless, as a combative group solid on the fundamental question, in contrast to the disunited Greens, they were the more powerful party, and political developments, particularly in foreign affairs, played into their hands. Although Italy attempted to take advantage of these dissensions and to seize Montenegrin territory

under the pretext of protecting the statehood of Montenegro, the armed pressure brought to bear was neither adequate nor long-lived.

It did not, however, come to the outbreak of civil war. The Green leaders had not the strength for it, and the Whites had no cause to provoke it. Resistance did break out on many sides, but this was insubordination rather than armed rebellion. Cetinje was surrounded, communications between towns were temporarily cut, and the Italians moved with their forces from the Boka. Repulsed from Cetinje without much bloodshed, the insurgents split into dwindling and increasingly irresolute groups of malcontents. The Italians withdrew as soon as they encountered opposition. The dispute petered out in unreconciled hatred and clandestine violence—the burning of insurgent villages, killings in ambush, beatings, prison sentences.

Blagota and Boško had suppressed the resistance in their district without much bloodshed. They had routed the insurgents, slaughtered them, arrested them, and driven them to surrender. They had cowed the clerical leaders and suppressed the rebels' accomplices. But it had been a laborious and dirty fight, often within one's own clan and among one's nearest kindred, conducted more with the rifle butt than with bullets, by informing, terrorizing, and bribing. In the course of it the power of Blagota and Boško had grown, and so had their friendship.

But at the same time, there was borne in on them the realization, which was also a presentiment, that although they were doing what they had to do and something that was unavoidable in order to give reality to the ideal to which they were pledged, yet in acting in this way they were simultaneously doing something repugnant to them, to their inmost, inherited ideas about how one should behave, not only to those who shared the same blood and

speech, but to human beings in general. This was something worse than war, since in war there were certain rules which were kept, in war they had not killed or maltreated prisoners or the wounded. But in this conflict everything was permitted; the abandonment, the transgression of traditional moral standards was even thrust upon one as a condition of success and of attaining one's end. Strangely, they concealed this realization, this presentiment, from each other, and even deliberately tried by their conduct, and most often by their brutality, to disguise the fact from each other and even from themselves.

Boško had been certain that Blagota, too, felt this sense of discrepancy between what one was obliged to do and what one would sooner not have done. In his own case he knew exactly when and where this feeling had first pierced his mind, although it had manifested itself in him before in the form of anguish or, still more often, in the form of sudden harsh or lenient actions toward insurgents or their accomplices.

It was in January 1919, in connection with the insurgent villages, buried in snow and in the smoke of burning houses. The two of them had been following from the top of the crags the advance of their soldiers and police, who had met with no resistance whatever. Lower down, on the edge of the forest, protected from the wind, the grooms were preparing lunch near a huge fire, arranging, on the outspread flap of the tent, dried meat, cream, cheese, slices of bread, and bottles of brandy—all seized from peasants. Round the fire warmed clerks, runners, quartermaster's staff, and guards, and up on the rock the frost was stinging under Boško's nails and his feet were stiffening in his boots. Through his field glasses he could see not only how far the police had penetrated up the valley, which was three to three and a half miles long—a pall of smoke from burning houses or sheds would always mark the limit of

their advance—but also, at the tips of the shady patches on the forest fringe, women and children swarming around the surviving cattle, and bayonets gleaming among them.

Boško fixed his field glasses on one such group right at the end of the valley under a cliff that leaned straight out of the sky over a cluster of huts. A woman in black was wrangling with a policeman about a spotted cow, and Blagota, a little to Boško's rear, was beginning to tap his boots with his whip, declaring: "They've got through to the last houses, and it's time for lunch." But guns somewhere in the hills above them started to go off again, although it was not possible to see where the shells were falling. Previously they had fired at random into the villages to cow and disperse the people. "We must stop the gunfire, too," Boško added, standing up and rubbing his eyes, dazzled by the sun on the snow and still unadjusted after looking through the glasses. "Let them go on putting the fear of God into the rabble," Blagota replied, "and let us lunch like men."

Before they had stepped onto the snow track, curses and entreaties were heard from the fire below. It turned out that in a cave the police had discovered Tomica, the commander of the Montenegrin national army, whom Boško and Blagota had known well earlier, during the wars, and they were now, with oaths, tying him to a beech trunk about twenty yards from the fire, while he was resisting with protests that he was innocent and had no idea where the insurgents were. Tomica, who had been wrestling with the clerk Adžić, a swarthy, tallish, slightly stooping fellow, began, as soon as Boško and Blagota approached the fire, to address himself only to them. "What does this mean, gentlemen, this lack of respect shown me? If I have done wrong in escaping from highhanded action by the police, let them treat me in accordance with the law and as a man should be treated."

In this appeal there was not only a sudden alteration of tone from truculence to calm reasoning, but also something scornful, as if he were implying: You see how you leading men carry on and what your method of government is like, a government that does not even observe its own laws! There was in this, of course, a touch of peasant cunning, a reassurance against the ill-treatment and humiliation that might yet befall him.

Tomica was a declared Green, a war hero and a notorious agitator. He was in his fifties, rather tall with little blue eyes, which barely sparkled under thick, shaggy eyebrows, and with long wolfish teeth under spreading, drooping mustaches. Though perhaps not the most important of the ringleaders, he was undoubtedly one of them, and Boško and Blagota—or so, at least, Blagota decided on Boško's behalf as well as his own—were furious with him, both as an opponent and because of his appeal to the law. Anxious lest their subordinates construe their attitude toward Tomica as leniency or hesitation, and without consulting each other, they pretended they had not noticed what was going on and sat down on the rug spread for them to have lunch. Without invitation, the two lieutenants and the two police clerks, who were accustomed to eat with the senior officers, as happens on headquarters staffs in time of war, also sat down to lunch. The third clerk, Adžić, did not hurry; he continued to torment Tomica, twisting the stick to which his hands were tied behind his back. "We observe the laws of your master, King Nikola. And since you're already a commander, we'll give you your promotion and make you a brigadier."

Adžić was well known as a bully, and one of the kind who plan their manhandling of a prisoner according to the occasion and the other man's personality. Furthermore, as often happens in wars and rebellions, he claimed the right to plan and carry out his bullying without regard for his

superiors. He obviously enjoyed this, in a quiet, slow way, but with a good deal of broad winking. People are always to be found who enjoy this sort of thing and who assert in this way their right to do so. On this occasion, too, everyone knew that he was not talking idly, and although nobody stopped eating, their expectation grew steadily tenser. Tomica obviously knew this about Adžić, since he began to appeal: "Captain Boško, don't let me suffer disgrace today! Commissioner Blagota, don't let them torture me like a beast. I may be an enemy, but I'm not scum!"

But both Boško and Blagota were silent, as if preoccupied with their food, though Boško noticed that Blagota had cheerfully and slyly winked at Adžić, as if to say: "You may, but don't go too far."

Up to the time of the Bombs Case, the beating and torturing of prisoners had been rare in Montenegro. It had become the practice overnight with the flaring up of civil war and the introduction of Serbian police methods, and although it was formally forbidden, it was widely employed. Blows with the fist or with a rifle butt were the only form administered in public. It was as if there were some insane passion in beating up Montenegrins in particular, who were far more sensitive to this than to long sentences of imprisonment or the heaviest fines or even to being shot. Moreover, with the new government, the idea appeared to have crept in that the main thing was to humiliate one's opponent, and that behavior of this sort to some degree confirmed one's devotion and sound principles, so that police officers, even those who were privately against such methods, vied with each other, taking care, of course, not to maim the offender and to see that the whole affair was confined to their own circle and did not get to the ears of the press or Parliament. And if rebellion did break out anywhere, the excesses of the police were

taken lightheartedly, if they were not actually considered meritorious.

Adžić suddenly started shouting: "Hurry up, hurry up! The new Brigadier can't wait for his badges!" Everyone turned around. A fair-haired, rosy-faced policeman, still a mere youth, came running up from below, carrying in his arms a huge tabby cat. They all stopped eating, and Blagota could not help asking with a laugh: "What the devil is he going to do with the cat?" Their ribald curiosity was such that it even showed in Tomica's face, but only for a moment; it soon gave way to an almost parental anxiety, as if something terrible were about to happen, not to him, but to someone very dear to him. He even uttered: "Oh my pain and grief!"

Adžić took the cat from the policeman and ordered him to remove the commander's belt and take down his baggy trousers, which were made of low-grade white wool and of a kind that only older men still wore. He had on no linen underpants—older people, especially the poor, sometimes went without them—and since his body was so thickly overgrown with long, curly, graying hair, one felt that, so far as protection from the cold was concerned, underpants were quite unnecessary for him. "You're a regular bear!" exclaimed Adžić, adding at once, calmly and seriously, "But since you Greens complain that we beat you up, I won't lay a finger on you. And it's up to you to see how you can win your brigadier's badges in a battle with this cat."

Neither the policemen nor the senior officers had realized what Adžić was preparing to do, and they looked on in silence. But Tomica clearly knew already and began to plead, almost with tears. "Spare me the shame for your sake, for God's sake!" No one, however, stirred a finger, and Adžić knelt in front of Tomica and, before thrusting

the cat into his left trouser leg, peeped under its tail and solemnly announced: "Oh, it's a tom. Well, you can't complain of our not paying due regard to your rank and station. You'll share the ring with a male, and not with a female." Then with a swift movement he took a garter from the policeman, hitched up the trousers, and tied them with a tight knot around Tomica's waist.

Even before he had finished doing this, the cat had begun to coil and uncoil, to squirm and yowl, looking for the way out of the trousers. Some laughter began all around, cautiously at first—until it was seen that the senior officers were laughing too—then louder and louder. Tomica first uttered a scream, and then began to cry out, in a faint, womanish way for a grown man, particularly after his epic appeals which sounded as though taken from the folk ballads. At the same time he tugged so violently at his bonds that the beech tree shook and snow started sprinkling from the branches.

Boško had not forgotten that there was something hideous and at the same time ludicrous in the fact that the cat, goaded by the bright steel tip and the blows of Adžić's stick, performed unlooked-for leaps and movements, while Tomica jumped and writhed, trying in vain to escape the scratches and bites. The whole company had not only stopped eating, but had gathered around the victim, some cheering on the cat, others the commander. One clerk, a pale, thin little fellow, was seized with such crazy laughter that he sat down on the snow track and, losing all sense of the respect due to his seniors, kicked his gaitered legs in the air, and a stout policeman started to dance around the fire. Teeth, weapons, metal buttons, and eyes sparkled and glittered in the sun.

Only two men did not laugh—Adžić and Tomica. Tomica, after the first cries and groans, made not a sound. His jaws were clenched, and perhaps if the noisy laughter

and mockery had not drowned all other sounds, one could even have heard the grinding of his teeth. As for Adžić, in his curly black beard, which covered nearly the whole of his face, passing into the curly, black fleece of his fur hat, one could scarcely perceive the smirk on his blue, full lips or the twinkle in his watchful black eyes.

Boško could not help noticing how Blagota was laughing, loudly and in sudden bursts, as if he were ready to put a stop to this maltreatment at any moment; but then, as the laughter flared up and jokes began to fly at the victim's expense, he joined in all the more unrestrainedly, and even began to wipe tears from the corners of his eyes. Boško laughed, too, but in a different way; he noticed that he was forcing himself to laugh, and with control and effort. But it was not until the cat, worn out, had almost ceased to wriggle, that he felt real uneasiness and distress.

Tears were running down Tomica's face, dripping from his mustaches, although he neither pleaded nor cried for help. Chatting over separate moments of the scene, the crowd began to drift away from the victim, and Adžić drove his stick into the snow, shook his hands as if to get rid of something dirty, and then, squatting down, began to carve thin slices of ham. "That was a good idea of yours," Blagota said to him appreciatively, and he squatted down himself and took some ham from Adžić.

It did not escape Boško that after all Blagota's laughter there remained a bitter, even a ferocious expression about the lips. Blagota became serious and gave orders for the cat to be removed from Tomica's trousers and released. Set at liberty, the cat slipped off down the hill toward the cottage whose roof stuck up out of the whiteness; the snow had melted from the caves, and a feeble smoke poured out in all directions through this channel.

Boško had expected Tomica to draw near the fire at once to warm his frozen hands. Instead, he sat down in the

snow, on the same spot where he had been standing, and thrust his face between his fists. His shoulders shook with sobs, and a wailing sound burst out from between his fingers, of the sort that men make when mourning for other men, but not so loud or so long-drawn. "Woe's me today and for evermore. My face is covered with shame."

All the feeling of uneasiness that had piled up inside Boško from the start suddenly broke from him; it was as much compassion for Tomica as a realization that they had done something contrary to custom, something ugly, which would not lightly be forgotten. "We went too far!" he cried. This unease was made stronger by the fact that all this was taking place in an unreal world, in a dazzling whiteness, on a hilltop under the naked sky, and not among men, but among beings resembling men yet fundamentally different from men, jeering at suffering and banded together solely for some incomprehensible purpose which had now become artificial and unreal. With this, Blagota, in spite of the serious expression on his face, did not agree. "Who will ever find the measure for human hate? And what would he do to us if he had the chance? Didn't some of those for whom he is acting roast and grill one of our men alive only yesterday?" Adžić did not hear their conversation, or took no account of it; he was quietly stuffing into his beard some bread with a slice of meat wrapped up in it and observed: "The guns have stopped firing. Now there'll be work for us policemen to do."

Up to that moment, Boško had believed that Blagota was in agreement with him and that he, too, felt uneasiness at the manhandling of Tomica. Even after Adžić had spoken, he was not sure that this was not so, and that it was only that Blagota was able to stifle this feeling and encourage the bullying and humiliation, though he found them disagreeable, since he understood them to be an unavoidable part of his service and his duty. For Boško, the

most unpleasant thing was that Blagota might grasp all this and represent it as halfheartedness on Boško's part in regard to the question of union and the fight against the insurgents. For although at one moment Boško had harbored doubts about the manhandling—why else should he have given orders so sternly for the release of Tomica?—he had in fact commented: "Our duty is to inspire resolution in our subordinates."

In any case, it turned out that Adžić was right. From that moment, violence started on a big scale. The spirit of rebellion had to be stifled once for all, and in such an action there is no measure or limit.

Later on, Boško ceased to feel uneasiness, but his experience with Tomica—those tears and the bitter lamentation of a grown man who had come bravely through three wars and every kind of misfortune—he could not forget, and it came back to him in milder forms. Now he still could not forgive Blagota for having deliberately taken his misgiving as vacillation, thus obviously covering up for his own doubts as to the rightness and the advantage of Adžić's conduct. Boško was now even less inclined to forgive Blagota, since the latter, after the outbreak of the feud between them, was now openly stressing Boško's equivocal attitude toward the union question by citing Tomica's case, in which he himself had not been able to go all the way with Adžić in his devising of new insults and tortures.

4

But the rebellion quickly flagged, and life flared up in political parties, commerce, and the courts of law. The presence of the two of them, who had shed blood on all sides, became objectionable in this district; hence their transfer to Sandžak. Their services up to that date were, of

course, acknowledged: Boško obtained a district of his own, and Blagota a larger and more important district than the one he had had in Montenegro. There was at least a year or two of work for men like themselves, unversed in modern administration. They grew aware that the Green opponents of union were becoming unrealistic and in many respects ridiculous in their embittered opposition, and that many of the supporters of union, especially former Montenegrin local leaders, were completely at sea and were at odds with the new times. In their new relationships with people from outside their own circle, they appeared simple, lost, odd, uncouth, mere self-seekers. Trained, anonymous officials, shrewd businessmen, and political touts shoved them aside as a mountain torrent does mud. But the most painful and preposterous thing of all was that in everyday life they came to terms most easily with their Green opponents, former local notables like themselves, even though the impassable chasm of hatred and violence from the time of the unification was still between them.

Something similar, though in a rather different way, was happening also to the remaining partisans of union, the idealists and the younger intellectuals, and the peasants. The intellectuals took jobs in various parts of the spacious new state, losing themselves in the daily round of an overly commercial existence. The peasants rushed into Metohija to seize Albanian lands, into Vojvodina as colonists, and into the wide world in search of work. More often than not they simply continued to suffer hardship on their own land, furious at their neighbors and at themselves, at the world at large and at the state that had sprung from their blood and suffering.

Moneygrubbers of every kind were the only ones who profited by union, although they had made practically no sacrifices for it. There were not many of them, and they

did not represent Montenegro, that Montenegro which, under leaders wildly intoxicated with the Serb Idea, had lifted itself out of darkness and bloodshed into independent statehood and into an individual dignity that was free of all allegiance but that owed to God and the ruler. That the thin crust of clan chieftains and men of authority about the court was in a state of decay, many had seen even before the war. That Montenegro had collapsed as a state, everyone realized as the war progressed, even the handful of supporters of the Petrović dynasty, whose unwillingness to admit it sprang solely from pride and obstinacy. The ties of clan and kindred and the patriarchal way of life had been dissolved and broken long before.

But it was not all over yet.

The Montenegrins still bore within themselves the vital sap of old communities, customs, and ideas. They still expressed themselves through the folk ballads, and they still lived under the intoxicating spell of honor and heroism. Finding themselves out of their depth and having no object on which to expend these still living energies, they were going to ruin by fighting each other; this was most conspicuous in the case of former army officers and former high officials of the government, irrespective of whether they were supporters or opponents of union. In them, the old Montenegrin mentality was fully preserved. Though most of them were in their fifties, they were physically well preserved, too, so that this demoralization sometimes took violent forms.

Actually, Montenegro was not demoralized, nor was the *esprit de corps* of its people; but the chieftains, the principal and most characteristic exponents of the Serb myth and of heroic Montenegro, felt stifled by their new and unforeseen conditions, almost taxed out of existence, at odds with everything, including themselves—which made the myth still purer, finer, and more unattainable.

The chieftains found it easy to opt for the Serbian bourgeois parties, usually for the ruling Radicals or Democrats. They were led to do so by insignificant details—petty calculations, perversity, or the persuasions of relations and friends. In reality completely at a loss, they considered such action an assertion of their skill in adapting themselves to the new conditions.

But who is capable of seeing, who has the courage to admit, his own demoralization, his own failure to adapt to the rhythm of life?

5

From Boško's to Blagota's district headquarters was a good four hours, through the valleys or across the open slopes mostly converted into farm land. But Boško knew that on Alat he would get there in three hours. Even so, the journey seemed long to him, and nothing on the way and all about him, though long familiar to him, could prevent the feeling that he was moving in unknown country; at every bend a hillock, a wood, or a meadow would take him by surprise, and the brooks and streams made a subdued murmuring sound that came from unfamiliar, inaccessible distances.

And although the memory of Šemsa grew fainter, in so far as it was a sensation of her body within his own, it became mingled and fused with another feeling, no less sweet, and of increasing strength, a sudden feeling of concern and love for the farm he had bought from the beg, which was being left ever farther behind him among the sweet-smelling abundance of autumn. He had won Šemsa at about the same time as the farm, but this was the first time the two of them—Šemsa and the farm—were joined not only in one and the same feeling of sadness and joy,

but also in the same images and memories, as if the garden or the meadow by the river were Šemsa herself and her eyes were the spring beneath the pear tree in the cool evening dusk.

The farm was barely two hours away from district headquarters, in a country suited equally for corn and fruit and cattle, with large pastures and rounded, woody hills, so that among the gentle Sandžak valleys there was also something of the freshness of the Montenegrin mountains. The possession of such a property had produced in Boško a change greater and more sudden than was the difference between this farm and his property in Montenegro. What, in fact, had his Montenegrin property amounted to, among the stony crags? A place from which one could barely scrape a living, whereas this farm in Sandžak offered unlimited possibilities of improvement and, with it, of wealth and enjoyment.

Almost every Saturday, and, when he could find an excuse, on other days as well, he went off to his new property. Last spring and summer, whenever he spent the night there, he not only seemed to return to his childhood—there was the same green freshness, the same cold water which invigorated and made hungry, the same delicious smell of hot milk in the evenings—but in everything, in every object and every place, he found the sensations of his early youth—it was all quivering with life, a part of his own body and existence. A stream ran there that cut across the Big Meadow, winding and filtering through the willows like a thought through a tangle of wishes and desires. Every night in summer the sound of the crickets recalled his youth, with its unrealized and unrealizable passions for women and its bloody brawls with the Moslems of the frontier. Everything there awoke in him the experiences of his youth, both those he had lived through and those that had not come to pass: the swelling of the fruit, the

scented showers of tumbled hay, the mating of cattle, even the sky, darker and starrier than the sky of Montenegro, and more especially the summer nights, close and mild, so black when there was no moon, so green in the moonlight.

"There's no doubt about it," he would say, "the beggars knew how to choose both the site and the land for enjoyable living!" And he began to restore the neglected property as if his own life were at stake—as perhaps it was. For what, in fact, had he had or known of life until now? Penury, strenuous frontier service, wars, captivity, and battles with insurgents—struggles as hungry and toilsome as those of his ancestors. It was true that without all this trouble he would never have acquired this farm and would have lived out the rest of his life in poverty and the empty glorification of his own and his family's exploits. He had earned, and now he had, something to live on.

And now there was a special attraction which drew him more and more often and irresistibly to the farm. The return to his youth found there incitements and opportunities to express itself in all its fullness, and through a woman. As a young officer, even if he had not been taken up with the demands of the service and of a dearly loved bride of good family, he had had to consider his reputation and not get involved with women. Besides, at that time he had not been attracted to them sufficiently to seek particular amusement with them. But now, no doubt because of the farm, his good pay, his secure position, and a wife who had suddenly grown old and bony, and especially because he was aging himself, desire attacked him more uncontrollably than it had in his youth. He assured himself proudly that his own case was different from that of others who decline in years or suddenly come into wealth: "I've neither indulged myself nor used up my strength. Haven't I the right to get something at least out of life now?"

But since he had hitherto been a good husband and no

frequenter of women, he had to be careful how and with what woman he started an affair. Even had there been some widow in his town, it would have been hard to take up with her unobserved; especially for him, since police accompanied him everywhere to protect him from rebels. There was in fact one woman there who was approachable and with whom it would have been possible to disguise one's relations suitably.

Immediately after the war a shrewd and ingenious young peasant had moved in from Kolašin; he had had some education and had opened a business. It was said of him that on the surrender of Montenegro he had got hold of some government goods and had shown some enterprise in the reselling of cattle plundered from the Moslems at the time of the Austrian collapse. He had more or less taken refuge in Sandžak, fearing revenge for his collaboration during the occupation. He was not a very savory character; so for the moment at least, until he had established himself in the town and in his business, he did not even grudge his wife, Ljubica, her open flirtations with officials. Just as the husband began by doing business with small folk, so she began with policemen and clerks, only to abandon them lightly and replace them by their superiors. Before the eyes of the whole region the business, the influence, and the contacts of the husband waxed stronger; so did the seductive ascent of the wife. If affairs in the town revolved mostly around the husband, every little corner of it seemed to be filled with the naïvely sensual laughter of his wife and the flaunting of her youthful curves. Everyone knew that any male could easily find access to her, but might also with equal ease be repulsed, quite irrespective of any success he might have had with her earlier. But since in her love affairs she displayed neither malice nor greed, everybody believed that she was not acting in collusion with her husband. Perhaps indeed she was not; perhaps her

husband's rise in the world of business and her own in the world of love happened to develop simultaneously and as if by agreement. Undoubtedly she hovered around men in authority all the more brazenly because she had observed that they distributed power and glamour, which she could obtain only through love. She could only gain by doing so. The more rapidly and even openly she climbed the official ladder as a mistress, the more her power and influence grew with her own husband, who saw less and less the more virulent the scandal grew. She, for her part, was able to amuse herself more openly and with more abandon, while exercising a more careful and more scrupulous choice of lovers; this was the attraction power had for her. Indeed—since this was the kind of woman she was—she enjoyed life, which with a little skill and effort proved completely in harmony with what was most vital in herself.

For Boško, however, it was unsuitable to become intimate with this woman, even though he might have disguised it by an appearance of friendship with her husband, who ardently desired it. There were political objections here; the memory of the trader's collaboration was still fresh and vivid, and his opponents would have made no small capital out of the District Chief's friendship with him and his wife. Apart from this, he felt he had a great advantage over Blagota by not being himself a ladies' man. He therefore suppressed his desire for Ljubica, although she paraded herself before his eyes a hundred times a day in a little town of some twenty houses, all the more alluring because she was half a townswoman, so that by her offers of love she drew him out of his rustic life into a rarer, unfamiliar world.

But in the end a woman had appeared who had satisfied his desire and of whose relations with him no one knew except his escort Naso—Šemsa, the Moslem woman, a laborer on his farm.

Šemsa's father, Alija, had held the lease of a water mill and had worked on the estate of a former landlord. Along with the property, Boško had acquired the water mill and the miller. Šemsa had been married, but had left her husband, who was a drunkard; divorce was easy among the Moslems. She helped on the estate and was now finding herself more and more often around the house, which the new owner visited, although there was not yet anyone there to serve him. A divorced woman, she was no longer as concerned about veiling her face, though she would have had to unveil anyway before Boško, her master, whom she met more and more frequently and from whom she took orders. But even if she tried, she could not hide the swaying of her heavy thighs and breasts. Of more than average height, she still had a slender waist and had lost none of her vigor. On hot days she sometimes went barefoot; and although a laborer, she kept herself clean and neat. Her sturdy frame stood firm and supple on broad feet, and at their first meeting eyes of a green as bright as grass, as the whole countryside, gazed frankly but submissively at her new master.

That green glance with the hidden gleam obtrusively returned to Boško as he was left alone. He was also attracted by the fact that Šemsa was a Moslem; if she were to embark on a love affair with a man of another faith, it would be because she could not resist the raging fire and force within herself. It was thought that Moslem women had a suppressed and covert fire not to be found in Montenegrin women, perhaps because they were not kept hidden away. But the fact that she was of another faith did not merely attract him by its mysteriousness, it also deterred him; it would be awkward if it became known that he was involved with a Moslem woman, especially a laborer.

It was the third day of Easter. The meadows were blue with orchids, the furrows steaming in the mild midday heat, and the river, which had been in spate, was beginning

to murmur as it fell, calling for help. Boško, who had arrived that morning from his district, came back to the house from a round of the estate with his boots wet and muddy from the squelching earth, full of ideas about all that must be done this first spring if what had been neglected for so long were to be put in order. In this frame of mind he sat down at the table which had been laid for him. Šemsa brought in the food in a broad, flat pan—this, too, remained from the beg's day—set it on the table, and retired to wait by the door with her hands folded stiffly across her front.

Boško ate slowly and reflected on the estate, as well as on the fact that here, in this same house, farm servants, Serbian women, had once waited on begs, as Šemsa was now waiting on him. When he had finished eating, he got up, and it came into his mind that he had forgotten to look at the two cows which had recently calved: the state had received them from Austria as part of war damages and had sold them to introduce thoroughbred stock. Šemsa continued to stand there, placid, motionless, gazing at the floor. Almost unintentionally, in passing, he caught her by the hand; she did not withdraw it. He led her toward the bed, and she came submissively, with heavy steps. He was astonished at the neatness and speed with which she shed her Turkish trousers; the whole thing happened more easily and simply than with Montenegrin women.

But he had still to discover Šemsa.

Under the agreed excuse that he might need her at any time, she spent the night in the kitchen whenever he came to the farm. And he now came for her sake no less than for the estate's. Boško noticed a mournful doubt in Naso's eyes at Šemsa's habit of sleeping at the house: the whole affair must have been plain to him, and he may well have thought it wrong that an alien, even if of senior rank,

should possess a woman of his own faith. Possibly he himself might have cast an eye on Šemsa or even had some dealings with her. Boško paid no heed to all this; he had neither forced nor bought Šemsa, although he had often thought that she would not have given herself so unquestioningly if he had not been a high official and the owner of the estate.

At the beginning Šemsa waited for him to summon her from the kitchen or tell her at what hour of the night she should come to him. But she quickly got used to his habits and came of her own accord when she had finished her work, not even waiting for the guards, of whom Naso was always one, to settle down in their room.

Boško would first hear the sound of her bare feet. Then she would stand by his bed, undo her plait of thick, almost golden hair and, as if in a single motion, which had nothing offensive in it, shed all her clothing; she had understood that he desired her so, and it was true that what particularly stirred him was this readiness and preparation to submit herself to his desires. She would leave him in the same way, without waiting for him to tell her to do so by word or sign. She understood that once satisfied, he liked to be left alone, and perhaps she even knew that with him this desire for privacy arose chiefly from the fact that at that moment he felt shame. So she would leave of her own accord, just at the moment when, without a syllable uttered, he was longing for it, without ever betraying her own dissatisfaction or frustration. And although his conscience stung him at the thought of his wife, Jovana, and his sons and of what the Montenegrins might say if it became known that he was involved with a Moslem hired laborer, he quickly fell into a sweet sleep, all scruples stifled by the recent presence of her strong young body.

Šemsa always preserved her initial submissiveness toward

him, even in moments of complete abandon. This was part of her attraction for him. She never asked him for anything, but always thanked him briefly and with delight for his presents, as if for favors which he was not in the least bound to give, while she herself felt committed to a still more complete and still more obedient submission.

This was how he won the estate and Šemsa.

But this morning these two fused in the same desire and the same thought—this morning, on the way to Blagota, to the reckoning that might turn out to be their final mutual destruction.

6

This morning Boško was continually pressing Alat on, in order to get ahead of Naso and Milić, to be free to say to himself:

Summer is passing and my pleasures will wither away. Will the sun warm me any more?

But where am I going, why must I go, why am I leaving you, Šemsa, my garden?

I am driven on by a force within me. Honor and pride and my inherited name are stronger than I am, than what I would like to be.

It would be easy to be a man if a man had not to choose between passion and honor, respect and shame. The good God created man to be forever rending himself, making decisions, so that man might create something.

And what is it that I, wretched man, want to create to-day? Ruin and destruction for myself and others. But even that is in accordance with God's will, and with the powers within me which rule over me.

Heaven does battle with earth, and in man their forces are joined and opposed. I wanted the farm, ease, and

wealth. And I got it. I did not want love—it overtook me, enslaved me.

But I will not be untrue to you, my ancestors, I will defend everything that has come down to me from you—bare pride and empty fame. I know that you were men, too, and lusted after lands and love. But you bequeathed me your humanity, your human stubbornness.

Bull butts against bull in the place where the cattle muster, and shall not man against man? I would not be the man I am, nor a true Serb, if I were to step out of the way, if here, in the midst of this land which we have not yet made Serb, I did not assert that life was worth less than a cigarette. Without the fight for the upper hand, there is no life.

You, my fresh spring, the soul of my garden, flow on, to your last drop. And you, Šemsa, the sweet scent of my fields, cease to haunt my sleep as you will my waking life. Let me be a fruit tree without a flower and a cliff without an echo, all that I must and do not wish to be.

This age is not mine, although I have given for it all that a human creature can give—youth, strength, my soul. What is a man's time to him if he wants to, if he must, be a man? Does not another age mean different men and different conditions, the most terrible monster with which a man has to wrestle? Does not a man wrestle with his own life, to dam it, to prevent its flowing away from him? Does a man know by what and for what he lives in an age that is forever different, with a destiny that is always fickle and always out of reach? Who would have said, only yesterday, that I would be traveling this road today? Yet I am, I must; I cannot, I dare not, swerve from this path. The strange moment comes when a man is ready to trample on the sky for a mere straw, when a mere straw is a man's whole world.

Sweet, intolerable, Montenegrin human pride!

My heritage without a master, my love without a strong arm to guard her! My heart will be heavy without you both.

I shall be lucky if today I die or take my adversary's life, for a speck of honor, for a crumb of my good name!

I have done much evil, even to my own folk, that I might find peace. Every candle burns and burns itself out in its own darkness. I had to do the same and crush what was human in me—for the Serb cause, for union. We had to wreck Montenegro, that Montenegro we had known, to save the Montenegro that knows no end. So it goes on, from generation to generation. Each man pays his debt to his time so that Montenegro may go on, so that the human race may go on.

I know that I am ruining myself for a word, but that word is a whole world; behind it lie men and circumstances.

I am to ruin myself on an empty point of honor!

And has my Serb Idea been realized?

No one saves his own world by destroying another man's: I could not do it either.

I shall blow out my candle. Let me live while I am the man I am, the only man I can be.

My Alat, my plaything, carry me out of the world, out of life; only do not carry me away from myself.

God, forgive me, it is as if I had passed judgment on myself.

Farewell, Šemsa, my delight. Flow away, spring, my clear, cold life!

A man asserts himself by the manner of his dying as much as by the way he lives.

Boško reached the town at the time he had foreseen and in the manner he wished.

It was ten o'clock, just when the market was at its liveliest, and he knew well that, broad-shouldered as he was, and compactly built into a frame of middle height, swarthy and with thick, heavy mustaches, with his cap carelessly thrown back, dressed in heavy cloth and gold that glittered in the broad daylight, and in unison with a well-fed, mettlesome horse, he looked bigger and fiercer, and even younger. He had intentionally put on his Montenegrin full-dress uniform, to appear broader and stronger and to have something to be buried in if the expected calamity overtook him. He knew, too, that it was forbidden to ride through the main street on horseback on Saturday, market day; but he had not hesitated long. Were common constables, some wretched Moslems, to stand in his way?

Let them know what they should know, who had come and how!

He urged his horse forward through the main street, scattering the peasants and causing the shopkeepers to peep out from behind their doors.

Having amused himself in this way, he did not dismount until Milić and Naso came to take his horse. He then walked twice up and down the main street, with his hands behind his back, looking over people's heads and taking just sufficient notice of them to reply to greetings. A path opened before him as if he were still on his capering horse. When he had finished his stroll, he all but cried aloud: "Well, so here we are!" He sat down in front of a coffee-house; it was not the biggest or the finest, but it stood at the junction of the bazaar and the peasants' corn market.

He at once began to treat known and unknown alike. Yet among the hubbub of the market and the café and the

talk at the table, he was alone, more alone than he had been that morning when he was moving among woods and properties, through his own sorrows and resolutions.

"I can't go back," he assured himself from time to time and with growing urgency, although he could in fact have returned, since he had already asserted his defiance by coming to Blagota's town. But it turned out as the Serbian proverb says: "You go to town when you will; you leave town when they let you." True, nobody detained him, but rumors continually reached his ears, whether by chance or deliberately, about Blagota's desire for a reconciliation and about his threats and about the intentions of the deputy Djukić—intentions both vague and contradictory. Boško's defiant arrival had clearly evoked in the little town all sorts of passions, desires, and curiosities. It was as if a cliff had suddenly crashed down into a pool and stirred up all its seemingly lifeless population.

The prospect that the conflict of political interests which found expression in the personal quarrel between Boško and Blagota might be resolved in agreement, or even through a sharp, but basically friendly, argument, struck no answering chord in Boško himself, as though it belonged to a world no longer his own. Yet this did not mean that he no longer wished it. On the contrary, the worst of the storm had blown itself out in him that morning, on horseback, in that lonely, embittered lament for the estate and for Šemsa. Now he was calm, collected, and, though ready to face anything with resolution, ready, too, to go to the utmost lengths to avoid any further increase of tension. Later on, at the inquiry, he said: "God is my witness. I did not want a quarrel, but I could not dodge it in time. It was as if I were bewitched." This coolness deepened Boško's feeling of loneliness, but it also gave him an exceptional courage and, above all, a clarity of deduction—almost

the power to experience in advance what was about to happen and to take the appropriate steps accordingly.

As he was getting ready for the journey that morning, he had already noticed this sharpness of observation and foresight in himself. He had therefore taken two revolvers and stuck them both in his belt; and although the holster was made only for one, he had forced them both in, asking himself: "What shall I do if one jams or if I use up all the bullets in it?" He knew that Blagota would not strike at him, but might not he or someone else suborn someone from the town to strike or otherwise humiliate him? "I won't descend to fisticuffs with tripe-eating townsmen," he concluded, stuffing a spare magazine into the right-hand pocket of his trousers.

Boško did not believe in marvels, at least not to any great extent or by daylight or outside places with a reputation for them—graveyards, rocky defiles, forests—nor did he regard this presentiment of his, this near-experience of coming events, as something miraculous. He simply foresaw a certain possibility, which would subsequently materialize almost exactly as he had conceived it.

He was therefore completely certain that an offer for a meeting would come, either from Blagota or from Djukić, more likely from Blagota, since Djukić was a cunning fox who was afraid of wetting his tail. He consequently delayed for a while his departure from the town, although by about midday he had finished buying his household necessities in the shops. For a long time he had not had or met a true friend in the town. But Naso's and Milić's almost constant presence, unbidden and, as it were, accidental, was agreeable and encouraging. True, there were opponents of Blagota and Djukić who readily approached him, shook his hand, and congratulated him on his daring in coming into town, to the bull's-eye of the target, prac-

tically alone. But none of them was willing to wade into the dispute for him.

"I'm as alone," he told himself, "among so many people as I'd be in the middle of the mountains on a moonless night. For this is not only a quarrel with a former friend and fellow soldier, but a quarrel with myself as well, with what we have been and with what we would like to be and cannot be. Aren't we the sons and grandsons of rebels against the Turks? Didn't our forefathers carve out their state from infidel empires and a nation without a destiny? Haven't we done the same? And now? We are swollen with pride and strength, as if we were little emperors, and we have staked all we have on somebody else's petty account."

About two in the afternoon he received a message, from Blagota, of course, as he had expected. Blagota proposed to him that at first dusk, about seven in the evening, they meet at Dosta's café. "Let's talk the matter over man to man." That was what he had said and that was how it was conveyed to Boško. Blagota had also let Boško know that he could bring whomever he wanted, since he would be doing the same; the dispute had been public and must be publicly ended.

Boško accepted the proposal, almost gladly. "I have never said that Blagota had lost his humanity." The prospect of a settlement calmed his loneliness and his keen visions of the future, and it all seemed to him somehow right. "I am the older man, and Blagota has insulted me more gravely."

Besides, Blagota had chosen his messenger skillfully and, beyond any doubt, with the best of intentions.

It was Boško's distant kinsman the standard-bearer Radoje, who in other circumstances would have been not only an unusual, but an unwelcome intermediary. He had

been notorious as an unyielding opponent of union. He obstinately continued to wear the national costume, right down to the leggings, he let his mustaches grow long, and, as he walked with strutting steps, he threw out his broad chest, all in order to emphasize the more strongly his Montenegrin patriotism. His dissatisfaction had been reinforced by the fact that the new state, having adopted the regulations of the former Serbian Army, did not provide for the rank of standard-bearer, which had not been entirely undistinguished in the Montenegrin Army. It did not even equate this post with any existing rank. In addition to the injustice inflicted on him by this denial of rank, Radoje was persecuted and jailed; proudly and openly he flaunted his discontent like a banner. But although he was illiterate and simple, even ridiculous in his deliberately old-fashioned behavior and in his arrogant opposition, he was not without wit, coarse and bitter, in his mocking of political opponents who had sold their beliefs for a mess of pottage. On this point he did not spare Boško either, branding his Serb patriotism as gold-plated or paid.

In spite of being a stubborn adversary, Radoje was a good fellow clansman to Boško, just because he remained loyal to everything that was old-fashioned. Political stand-points inconsistent with clan ties and sentiments might obscure them, but not extinguish them. Politics and kinship were two distinct concepts, but each one remained untouched in him. With Boško or any other kinsmen, he might quarrel to the point of drawing his weapons, but he never forgot the blood tie, which remained unbroken and grew all the more painful the keener the dispute. For him there was no serious significance in the fact that Boško was subordinating his blood ties to his official duty and his political interests; he would always defend Boško, he would even be ready to lay down his life for him if

someone from another clan were to attack him. "For better or for worse, he's a man of my own blood, and I won't let another judge him!"

Blagota knew all this, and it was for this reason that he had chosen him as go-between. And Boško, knowing Radoje still better, begged him, after he had received the proposal for a meeting, to return to him and keep him company, since he would be alone tonight at the meeting with Blagota and his supporters. Radoje agreed, even with enthusiasm. He rejoiced at this bad blood between two distinguished Whites, but he was also ready to come to the aid of his fellow clansman in need. Even Boško was obliged to give a wry smile at Radoje's malicious remark: "My God, at the rate you Unionists are going, you will be reduced to having us Greens unite you." In his heart, Boško had to admire the Standard-Bearer's readiness to take a risk for his sake, opposed to him as he was. For clan feeling, although still strong in Boško, had even in his father taken second place to personal and state considerations. But the presentiment of danger, his own loneliness, Radoje's generous conception of clan brotherhood, and, in particular, Radoje's personality—simplehearted, courageous, all of a piece, and like something from a former age and out of Boško's first memories—revived in Boško repressed and cut-off clan sentiments—the love of kinsfolk, the passion for blood revenge, the blessedness of common springs, woods, and pastures, and the feeling of solidarity in the face of people of another blood and name. And although he knew that these feelings would wane as soon as circumstances changed and other, different needs came up, he could not help saying to Radoje, on the latter's return from Blagota: "There's nothing like one's own folk." At that, Radoje bridled and did not let slip the chance to nip the political opponent in his kinsman: "You didn't forget

your own folk even when you Whites were burning Montenegrin houses!"

But Boško received another, not less important message—to be exact, not a message, but a piece of information which an officer from his wartime unit and now a political sympathizer gave him, a man by the name of Vuksan Topović, a government clerk in Blagota's district. It was after six o'clock in the evening when Topović told Boško in the café, in Radoje's presence, though he did not know the exact details or who was effectively in charge: "The rumor is that the gypsies and town riffraff will see you out of town by rattling cans and throwing tomatoes and eggs at you." Boško had been hearing from others since two in the afternoon that something was being prepared against him, but it was all vague and indefinite. Now the whole thing took concrete shape, and since he trusted Topović, he could not mistrust his words. Actually, Topović did not know for certain that something of this kind was brewing. He had merely heard from the police clerk, Krsto Marić, that the gypsies had already been assembled and that everything was ready to meet Boško at the exit from the town and escort him, as the clerk had expressed it, in a fitting manner. Although Vuksan's story confirmed that Blagota had a part in this—the clerk was his subordinate—Boško did not openly display indignation or excitement in spite of his irascible temperament. He had no hope that a settlement with Blagota would come easily, and he had already become accustomed to every sort of deceitful trick. The gypsy escort was a malicious idea. Boško could not fire at gypsies, nor could he defend himself against them. But he found a way out. I won't look for the culprit among the gypsies, he silently concluded as he thought to himself: If this happens, I shall ride off to Blagota's house and challenge him to a showdown with our guns.

It was Radoje who did get excited. Thumping the table with his broad palm, in a pool of brandy, he shouted so that the whole café could hear: "A Simović's blood shall flow before gypsies dishonor a Simović!"

Topović was not agitated either. Tricks, ruses, even gypsies and rotten eggs, as weapons against one's opponents, he regarded as something quite normal and practically inevitable. He quietly let slip through his thin, bluish lips: "But what else can you expect from these Radicals?" As a rule he was a taciturn, withdrawn fellow—one of those men of whom it is impossible at first sight to say how much they know and what they may be prepared to do. He suffered from some internal complaint in the liver or kidneys, and an acid bitterness never left his peaked, yellow face. He was unmarried, and displayed no inclination for women. Just over thirty, he gave the impression of a man of forty; he had sharp little wrinkles around his eyes and his nose, and his temples were already prematurely gray. The causes of his growing old and sick before his time had undoubtedly been his war wounds and his starvation in captivity. But the strained bitterness that seeped through his every word and welled from his greenish eyes resulted from his embitterment with life, from his having been passed over in the service, from his poverty, and from the mean trickeries of politics. With his scanty education—he had completed only the primary school—he possibly had not deserved any better. But having previously been employed in the Montenegrin administration, and having attained noncommissioned officer's rank in the army by his quick intelligence as well as by his courage, and having distinguished himself in the National Guard in the fight against the opponents of union, he considered a clerk's job to be not only insecure and ill paid, but humiliating. Even if he could have reconciled himself with this job as a starting point, in accordance with the promises

made to him, his retention in the same job for three years without any prospect of promotion in the near future could only embitter a man who was discontented and ill.

Boško was close to Topović in spite of the difference in their years and standing. This was the closeness of two soldiers. Topović had stood out in the unit by his intelligent and dogged enterprise, and Boško had seen to it that he was made a noncommissioned officer and had entrusted to him, despite his physical frailty, the riskiest and most arduous tasks. It had been at Boško's intercession that Topović got employment in Blagota's office—Boško and Blagota had been friends at the time—and the fact that Blagota had not so far turned him out was certainly owing to Topović's indisputable services in war and to the unionist cause. But there was also another kind of intimacy between Boško and Topović, the rare kind that comes from inner affinities and regardless of social, economic, and other differences between two people. This intimacy did not express itself in words, in the rendering of services, or in the exchange of marks of esteem, although they did pay attention to each other in these respects. It came from a similar attitude toward the world and toward life of which they, as uneducated men, were hardly aware. It was a defiance of circumstances, of realities even, which in Boško took the form of a vocal, recklessly heroic attitude and quick temper, and in Topović of a silent endurance and an unostentatious but persistent gratitude to anyone who did anything for him, coupled with covert, unappeasable hatred of anyone who trod on his toes in any way. There was in their relationship something of that between father and son, a sort of extended connection between two generations which is spontaneously carried on by each in his own way. And although they had seen little of each other during the last two years, this intimacy existed between them as if they had never been parted.

Finding himself with his wartime chief and political sympathizer, and having forebodings of evil and of a general squaring of accounts, Topović decided, without a word said, that his place was at Boško's side, regardless of the fact that Boško had not asked him and that he himself was not threatened.

The three of them remained in the café till dusk, deliberately avoiding all mention of the evening's encounter, although it must have been the only topic in their minds. "We shall see what the night brings," said Radoje. "By day you White leaders have: 't much to boast about."

8

Blagota would have spent the day worrying even without Boško's unexpected arrival. That evening, when dusk closed in on the town and the gardens revive with its freshness and with scents of ripe fruit, he was to meet Dafina—Dafa Karišik. For him this meeting was something more than a transport of love; it meant entry into a new world and his own transformation within it.

In addition to its being market day, Blagota was overburdened with visits and business. Except for Marić, he had not a single clerk sufficiently competent to be treated as trustworthy, and he himself did not have enough knowledge of law and administration to work without difficulties. This clerk, who had managed to be put in charge of municipal accounts, was in reality contriving with the canvassers of Deputy Djukić.

And then, all of a sudden, Boško was in the town!

Marić had told the story, to all appearances, quite calmly, but in fact with suppressed malice, in that treacherous voice of his and in carefully chosen words in which there was as much flattery as disparagement. Before Blagota

heard the end of it, the blood was already flooding his face and ears, and waves of anger were lapping at his mind. In order to maintain his self-control before Marić, he held on to the table so tightly with his long, bony, hairy fingers that his nails went white at the edges. This, of course, did not escape Marić's notice, and he later reported it as a symptom of Blagota's disquiet. But Blagota's rage quickly left him, especially since its object had been Marić as much as Boško. Marić, with his fat, bluish, and immobile face, his big eyes under scanty eyebrows, and his curling upper lip under clipped brown mustaches, did not appear to talk; the words flowed out of him spontaneously—cloudy, icy, detached. With some secondary schooling behind him and with innumerable political contacts, especially with Deputy Djukić, he was already developing as the future professional replacement for Blagota. His account of Boško's impertinent gallop through the bazaar—these were precisely the words he used—Blagota took to be an unspoken rebuke and challenge: That's what you're allowing to go on, Mr. Commissioner, and it's all the result of your slowness, ignorance, and inexperience.

In spite of this, Blagota soon began to feel once more those teasing and pleasurable flutterings all over his body, and most strongly in his chest and loins, which he knew so well as a prelude to his lover's meetings, especially with a new woman.

Really, he quickly concluded, really, it isn't as though there were any serious reasons for a quarrel, especially between us, between him and me. If Boško is obstinate and proud, can't I be a bit more pliable, since I am the younger man; isn't it for me to make the first step? We've both played dirty tricks on each other and said things we shouldn't have in the heat of the moment, but we went as far as that at the instigation of others, more particularly the parliamentary candidates. Still, it can all be smoothed

over and cleared up. It's true that Boško's arrival is awkward, especially for Djukić. At the time of the elections Boško so stirred up his district and organized the canvassing that Djukić didn't dare even put his head in there. But that's Djukić's affair. Djukić's? Yes. If only it were his alone!

Although it was for Blagota a matter of indifference that Boško would enhance his reputation, particularly among the Montenegrins, by his defiant entry today, and more especially if they did not come out against him, it was not a matter of indifference to him how this would be taken by Djukić, on whom his own future career largely depended and in particular his transfer to a bigger and more civilized district, which he needed for the education of his children and to satisfy his longing for a comfortable town life.

Blagota was aware that he had been hasty, especially in not consulting Tomo Djukić, with his message to Boško regarding a meeting that evening in an attempt to settle their quarrel. But everything had impelled him to it: the instructions of higher authority, his duty toward his former friendship with Boško, his desire to display his independence at least to himself, his impatient efforts not to miss his much desired appointment with Dafina. He also felt, and the thought penetrated his mind with disagreeable sharpness from time to time, that the settlement of the dispute with Boško did not depend on him, just as the causes behind the quarrel did not lie within them, except perhaps in their temperaments and habits, which were also weapons adapted for use independently of them. He remembered his earlier conclusions: A man would always like to be independent, but he is always dependent on one thing or another. We used to be dependent on the ruler and the clan chiefs; now we are dependent on parties and banks.

Of course, Blagota's dependence on Tomo Djukić was

not personal, nor was it direct or humiliating; he would not have consented to or stood for that. But it was none the weaker for that, and in another, impersonal sense, it was even direct. It arose out of circumstances, out of the whole trend of life. It was life itself, the inevitable way of life in the new conditions, the new state.

This dependence could only be increased by his loose living. His wife's dowry—the house and the shop—even if it had not been loaded with debt during the war, would speedily have melted away thanks to Blagota's fecklessness and lavish generosity. It is absolutely true that there is no wealth that cannot be squandered if it is not made to breed! His attempt to purchase an estate in Boško's district was to place the remains of his wife's wealth in something that, if resold, might bring in some return. Such sudden and usually impractical ideas do take hold of spendthrifts. Blagota knew of this trait in himself from previous experience, but in this case the prospects of profit were well founded, since prices in the Moslem areas were bound to rise as soon as political conditions settled down. But this enterprise also went wrong, because of the dispute with Boško, and now Blagota was dependent on his official salary, running into debt and marveling at his wife's cleverness in always greeting him with a fully laden table and maintaining the house and the children although he himself spent more than half his pay—as if it were to prove the saying that “it's the last ducat that lasts longest.”

His plan to buy an estate had been purely for speculation, since it had never even entered his head to live in the country. To him that meant a return to the dunghill and the day-and-night struggle over crops and cattle, haggling with day laborers and even strenuous labor on one's own part, which seldom paid. Partly through his wife, who was a townswoman, and partly through his own inclination, he had become accustomed to the townsman's life of

ease, in which everything finds its way to the rich man's table and everyone hastens to show confidence and respect to a high official such as he was.

Apart from this, he was particularly attracted by townswomen, not only by their perfumed cleanliness and carefully tended appearance, but also by their smooth manner of making up to a man and keeping him obscurely guessing even in regard to what they undisguisedly desired and did. Just as it was agreeable from time to time to visit the country to get the feel of the steady current of youth and the earth and of that rough, unpolished life, so he would sometimes find himself drawn to some village girl, bewildered and suddenly quite unable to resist a man of position, a girl refreshing with the harsh scents he had almost forgotten. But these were things he desired only occasionally; by now he belonged to the town and to the life there.

Blagota, however, was not a true spendthrift. He simply had no idea how to make money and could not restrain his hospitality and generosity. This was to some extent traditional; it went with gentle birth and high courage. But now, in conditions in which everything was measured and paid for in terms of money, it led to prodigality. But he brought to it something personal, too—an irresistible enjoyment of entertaining others. He simply could not help being lavish, and that, as was becoming, without being ostentatious or loud. As he himself knew, he was well known and liked for this.

In addition to this irrepressible personal bent, the hospitality in town, compared with the country, knew no measure or limit but that of an empty pocket. In the country one entertains people on what one's own estate and cattle provide, and to the extent to which they provide it; in town, on the other hand, one entertains them out of money, with which one can go on buying without limit. In the country, even if there is a shortage of something, enter-

tainment is still considered lavish if it finds expression in a generous outpouring of what there is. But in town everything is to be had, if one is hospitable and if there is money about. Blagota was more hospitable than rich; that was where the trouble lay. Besides, his name and position and his feeling of what honor required demanded a better standard of living and dressing and everything else, both for himself and for his family.

It is said: "Every man after his own manner." And Blagota, conscious that he could not do without women, as he could not without entertainment, did not even attempt to deny his two passions. He had always been hospitable and had always liked women. In earlier days the two had no connection. But now the one involved the other; his hospitality enhanced his reputation and attracted women, and his relations with women and his desire for fresh experience drove him to spending and to attempts to heighten further his reputation. His wife, Bojana, did not hamper him in either direction. Prematurely withered and toothless, which was the fate of most elderly townswomen, after childbearing, she was content that in the end her handsome, proud, and fiery husband would always return to her. If he had not been in a prominent position and famous as a ladies' man, he would not have brought money into his dealings with women, because to him anything of that sort would have been trafficking in something glorious, not to be measured in terms of money, and sacred in its own way. Nevertheless, his womanizing did require money, and that in greater and greater abundance. He had to dress himself well, improve his appearance, and distribute presents worthy of him, and worthy of that self which he wished to display and to impress upon the world and on some beautiful woman.

Every man decides his own fate, some for better, some for worse, but all according to their possibilities and within

the circumstances laid down for them. Blagota, who was aware of this after his fashion, would often express it by a proverb he had once heard and which, in appearance at least, did not match either his profession as a stern guardian of law and order or his heroic ancestry: "The millstone turns and grinds and grinds." He used the same expression today with Radoje, when he sent him to Boško with the invitation-to a meeting: "Come what may, I have done what I could."

9

Like Boško, Blagota had experienced at the time of the struggle for union an inner lack of conformity with what he was doing and with what was going on. But whereas Boško kept to himself his gnawing doubts and insecurities, which found expression chiefly in the ill-treatment of Standard-Bearer Tomica, Blagota expressed his to his friends. True, he did not give his hesitations any political, and certainly no moral, complexion. If his attitude could be described as hesitant, it was in no way related to the manner in which union was being carried out. The sudden and violent extinction of the previous way of life and point of view assumed for him a look of unreality; it was like being disagreeably roused from a sleep which had flowed on unperceived and even enjoyably until an unexpected, forced awakening. Life and political strife developed gradually and imperceptibly. From the war and the Montenegrin surrender they had passed into the fight for union and the suppression of its adversaries. Acts of violence had multiplied, together with hopes in the new state, which promised to be more powerful than any that the South Slavs had ever had. In spite of its continued growth, violence came to seem increasingly natural in its various

forms and courses, simply because it was employed in defense against all that the opposite party was attempting or might attempt.

This rough awakening struck Blagota all the more painfully and disagreeably in that it not only disrupted the even tenor of his daily, and certainly vindictive, settling of accounts with the rebels and their accomplices, but it also struck at the most sensitive side of his nature, his relations with women. From his early youth he had always liked women, but the continuous fighting had added to his manner of approach to women a greater, almost a frantic, recklessness. This had come about somehow of itself, with the universal, unimaginable breakdown of living conditions—the wretched deaths of thousands in prison camps, the mutilation of more thousands at the different fronts, the still more widespread, more unexpected, and more fatal deaths from Spanish influenza, and, last of all, the squaring of accounts within the country itself. Relations between men and women had grown more shameless and even more brutal, coming to resemble more and more an uncontrolled, unpremeditated, almost desperate mating. The war casualties and the epidemics had increased the number of women: all kinds were available, and in all circumstances. And Blagota became less and less particular, driven on by the changes within himself, by the desire to make up for the best years of his life sacrificed in the war, by the fear of letting slip the years that remained, and also by his enjoyment of the rough, almost violent assertion of his masculine power.

In the midst of this life an incident occurred that, for a moment at least, disturbed him and raised doubts—not, of course, about what he was doing, because he did what he had to do in accordance with his own ideas and his duties, but doubts as to the greatness and magnificence of the reality that was being born out of blood, tears, and execra-

tions. The doubt did not, indeed, present itself exactly in that light, but, rather, through his realization of the depths of Montenegro's destruction and ruin, that Montenegro in which he had himself lived and which until then he had believed merely had to join the new state as it was, by removing the dynasty and suppressing the bitterest enemies of union. This incident drove deep into his mind. What happened was not simply out of line with what he desired and what he, like so many other convinced and fiery supporters of union, was doing. It was too deep and too far-reaching a breach of former ties.

At the end of the winter of 1920, the rebel Radojica, notorious for his audacity and cruelty, had been detected and captured. Like many others of less importance, he was subjected to torture. This was done not only out of the need to uncover his fellow conspirators and accomplices, but because of an already established police practice, which had come from Serbia, had begun to develop in Montenegro just before the war, and had spread rapidly in the conflicts that followed. Even so, no one would have dared to intercede on behalf of an opponent of union whose killings and cruelties had been beyond counting.

Nevertheless, there was one such person, his sister, Jagoda.

It was the first time she had left her clan country and her utterly remote mountain village, Krnja Jela. A simple girl of sixteen, she had never had to deal with anything but her own cattle. She came to see the District Chief, Blagota, to beg on her brother's behalf, not that they should spare his life, but that they should not torture him. She did not hesitate, she did not even consider it shameful, to offer the District Chief her maidenhead if only she could help her brother. She had heard that by this means quite a lot could be gained from this authority. She had

nothing else to offer, and she had changed her cloth smock for a borrowed silk blouse to be more attractive to this high officer.

Blagota had had experience before with women who had tried to help themselves or their people by such means. He had always evaded this, both for the sake of his official and political conscience and because he considered such relations to be humiliating to himself and to the woman. In his recklessness, he had had two or three such experiences; that is, he had found out only afterward that this had been precisely their intention. But he knew that with other men it had sometimes been possible to obtain results by these means. They were usually employed by women of bad reputation, and until the appearance of the girl from Krnja Jela, Blagota had always regarded such cases as trivial and incidental. This girl's offer revealed to him not only the reality of the offers made by many women who had submitted themselves to him—there had been less in them of passion and love than of the desire for power and wealth—but also the depth of the abyss into which Montenegro had fallen and in which it was drowning. And while Jagoda's eyes, small and black in the light of the evening glow with which the rocky mountain peaks were ablaze, flashed with a fierce, subdued hardness as much as with her agonized pleading that he take her and have mercy on her brother, he cried out within himself: "See, this is what I have come to, what Montenegro has come to! What must she have overcome and crushed within herself, this village shepherd girl who is not yet fully grown, with a whiteness and rosiness still untouched even by the sun, and looks and an experience of life uncorrupted by malice and selfishness."

He sent her honorably away and pleaded for her brother, for at least a remission of his torture, taking the risk that

this might be construed, as in fact it was, as a yielding to the opponents of union and as a compensation for the girl's virginity.

From that time on Blagota had begun to look hard at himself, and thereby at everything about him. He became more restrained and prudent in his conduct of the struggle, and also more selective in his choice of women.

Jagoda soon vanished almost entirely from his memory. He did recall that there had once been a girl who had offered herself for her brother. What remained unforgettable and perpetually real and alive were her eyes, in which, in the evening glow, it had been impossible to tell the pupil from the iris, or her anger from her humility. And, of course, the question: Did it all have to be like this?

10

In regard to Boško, Blagota was convinced that he had done all he could, since he longed for one thing only—to be with Dafina.

Early autumn, with its scents of roast corn, ripe pears, and kebab, forever yellow and warm, flowed by with the river below the windows of the district headquarters, a roomy old house with an upper story of lath and plaster and far-projecting gables. The murmur of the hurrying river and of the bazaar in the little town—merchants haggling and peasants swearing and protesting about nothing at all—melted into one long-drawn-out chant completely in harmony with the subdued heat and the veiled sunshine. Oh to have done with everything as soon as possible and to go off to Dafina's, away from the daily round and tormenting dreams, to a life of new and unimaginable joys. In the evening the freshness of mountains and gardens would come rolling down the river, but the night would hold

something of the warmth of the day. Dafina would be reluctant, but in an affectionate way, and her dark eyes would be liquid and shining.

His transfer to this district, to a town with a majority of old-fashioned inhabitants, had been in tune with Blagota's inner change of mood, especially with his desire for a comfortable, gentlemanly life. The town, which was a very old one, with a well-developed taste for the delightful and the beautiful, certainly contained women, both Serb and Moslem, who had, so to say, a refined capacity for enjoyment. But the more distant these women were from him, an outsider, the more their manners seemed to him new and unfathomable. The long courtships, with melancholy singing and flowers thrown over palings and passionate vows made through go-betweens—all this was for him impossible and incomprehensible. And these people, Christians and Moslems, lived withdrawn and inaccessible behind grills and walls, in gardens and courtyards. Their houses were closed and their women invisible except to their nearest kinsfolk. For a stranger, and particularly for a Montenegrin, it was difficult to approach the women here, except those with the worst of reputations.

There was one, Dafina, who could be approached easily and openly. A relationship with her would be impossible to conceal, but even if it were detected, no one would see anything shameful in it. Furthermore, a liaison with her would enhance, rather than lower, a man's reputation. Beauty seemed to have its own special rights in this town and could even give way to passion if genuinely gripped by it. It was as though it were thought that such behavior was natural to beautiful creatures: they were made for enjoyment, their own enjoyment and that of others.

Dafina was, if not the greatest, then certainly the most exceptional and most attractive beauty of the three towns on the river. She may genuinely have enjoyed pleasure,

though she seldom gave herself to it. It was easy to approach her, but she remained obstinately and astutely impregnable. To him she remained unattainable and therefore all the more desired. And although he knew that in his own mind there was a conflict between the Dafina who was a figment of his passion and the real Dafina—that clever and rather tough merchant's wife—between the myth of Dafina and her commercial vulgarity, between his own dream of beauty and the gray reality, he surrendered himself more and more to his vision, to the mythical Dafina and the wonder of her beauty.

Born of a run-down merchant family from Old Serbia, from Prizren, she had married here the last offshoot of an equally worn-out stock. Her husband had died shortly after the wedding, leaving her with a daughter and ample means—shops in the bazaar and a house and gardens near the town. She was too well off to be dependent on anybody and too good-looking and too refined for any man to approach her. Suitors did in fact come one after another following her husband's death; but as word soon spread that she did not wish to marry and leave her daughter and her estate to her husband's uncles, they ceased to ask for her hand and overwhelmed her with offers of love. But there were few, if any, who could boast of having won her favor. She never refused anyone, or so it was said, but she chose at length and carefully. One had to fight hard to attract her attention. Her greatest enjoyment seemed to lie in this choosing, in playing with love. Her fastidiousness went to such lengths that shortly after her husband's death the young and prominent Dizdarević was driven by her to ruin, to crazy conduct, drinking too much, and overdriving his horse and chasing through the market place and swimming across the swollen river. It was this ruin of the distracted Beg that made her fastidious character known. Admiration for her beauty, which lay in the harmony of her

figure, the grace of her carriage, and her choice of language, and the fear of being rejected held back her suitors, both the open and the secret, the bachelors and the married men. She even figured in their songs; in her own way she became the darling and the queen of the whole town.

People came from the neighboring towns to see this widow of peculiar temperament and beauty. She received and dismissed them, jested and challenged, but remained like an embattled tower on the rock above the river. It was rumored that she had had two or three affairs, of short duration, but ardent. The names of these lovers were known, and also the circumstances in which the liaisons had been formed; it was always she who had chosen and, being quickly surfeited or dissatisfied for some reason or other, it was she who had broken off. But no one had been able to fathom just why she had chosen some and not others and how a widow who was so good-looking and surely passionate could restrain herself in the intervals between her short love affairs; there might have been boys from the estate or the warehouses, or some secret, permanent lover, but more likely no one. Though already close to forty, she continued to be mysterious and attractive. She herself was aware of it and reveled in it.

Time went on, empires fell, but she stayed the same. Even her beauty, though it had ripened, seemed not to fade.

She still dressed in the old manner, after the fashion of Moslem women, like other Serbian townswomen at the time of Turkish rule. In this costume, weighed down and blazing with gold embroidery, with rich dark colors and deep folds, she knew how to both stress and veil her beauty. Dress of this kind matched her reputation as well as her figure, with its full and warm contours and her slow, swaying walk. Whenever she went anywhere in full dress, she deliberately struck across through the bazaar, usually ac-

accompanied by her daughter, who was already grown and also good-looking, but in another style—frail, white, and seemingly passionless. Salutations came from the shopkeepers and café proprietors, with dignity but also with a suppressed lasciviousness. Thus, without giving offense they could take pleasure in her ornaments and dress, in her movements and in her mild and cheerful smile, in the softly trilled words with which she replied to their greetings and returned jests and timid remarks, in the dark gleam of her eyes, accentuated by the dusky circles around them and by long, curling dark lashes, and, above all, in the vivid silky reflection of her olive skin. She passed slowly by without attempting to hinder their enjoyment and undisguisedly rejoicing in it. In their own way the children understood this relationship between her and the bazaar, and as soon as she entered it, one of them would cry: "Here's Dafa, gentlemen," which was taken as a summons and a mild jest. And the bazaar men would peep out and come running to enjoy the sight, as if it were a picture or a bright autumn day full of the delights of sunshine and ripe fruit. Just as the little town had its medieval church and its town hall built over stone wells, it had its beauty from a past age, all the dearer now because nothing could arrest the gradual waning of her looks. Enjoyment of this kind was accessible to all, rich and poor, the crippled and the old.

It was true for the half-crazed monk, whose name nobody seemed to know, nor how or on what he lived. Some people remembered that he had come with the Montenegrin Army in 1912; he now wore a tattered Montenegrin cap with the faded initials of the late King Nikola on it, N. I. He took care of the little church of Saint Nicholas, all sunk into its graveyard, into antiquity, into the past. He believed that he must still protect this house of prayer from the infidels and against the monster which appeared

every year with fire from the sun. In summer Dafina normally lived outside the town, on a little property below the church. The river ran there below meadows and gardens, and on hot days Dafina bathed in the stream, a thing no woman or girl had ever done, screened from the town by a willow clump, and with her maidservant keeping watch on the bank above her. Only the monk managed to steal through the corn—and possibly the spritely, mischievous widow let him sin with his eyes, so that, having gazed his fill on the glory of woman's nakedness, he might run off behind the church to roll in the nettles. The whole town laughed at this, but without malice.

Thus Dafina's beauty was more accessible to a mad monk than to other men.

This, then, was the woman Blagota was courting. It was not difficult to reach her, or even to visit her. But for half a year he had in vain been trying to become more intimate with her. Whenever it seemed to him that he was getting somewhere in the affair, she would turn the whole thing to jest. He kept removing one obstacle after another. He ceased to go with other women, aware that Dafina would not put up with his devotion to another, not even his own wife. In order to enter her circle, he began to cultivate relations with the townspeople, to pay visits to them and to receive them in his own house. The removal of barriers between the local people and the newcomers was to some extent also his duty as the senior authority. He fulfilled it in all sincerity; unlike other Montenegrin chiefs, he did not consider that he was doing a favor to a townsman by drinking his coffee. More and more he associated with the townspeople, and drew closer to Dafina. But he knew that he could not attract her simply because he was in authority, and still less as a Montenegrin—the townsfolk regarded the Montenegrins as a violent, greedy, and barbarous lot. He was not a simple highlander, but a

distinguished Montenegrin, which is to say, he had a good deal of the highlander in him, though with some refinement. To her, his origin was actually a barrier, since by attaching herself to him she would cut herself off from the town's general way of thinking, which was antipathetic to the newcomers and even contemptuous of them, and which was so kind to her and into which she was blissfully sinking as into warm water.

This barrier he could not remove, but he hoped that he might be able to turn it to his advantage. He was not only a fine figure of a man—lately he had been at still greater pains to improve his appearance, and had even clipped his mustaches—but a man, even by urban standards, of striking and unusual good looks, lean, swarthy, and with an easy, jaunty carriage. Moreover, he was a renowned warrior who did not spare himself in anything that concerned honor and pride. It might also have proved attractive that he was frank, prompt, and stern in dealing with his adversaries, in a society which under the Turks had been accustomed to being handled harshly but not frankly. His bluff, proud, yet friendly manner, his highland personality, might appeal to Dafina, as he had already observed, just because everything about her was soft and subdued.

And he in his turn was attracted by this clinging warmth in her and her surroundings. This was a new, unfamiliar beauty. And in him it was a new kind of desire, quite unlike those swift, transitory passions to which hitherto he had so easily surrendered himself and in which there had been more of male abandon than of tenderness, and less love than bare lust. Blagota felt that success with Dafina would not only be a special pleasure, it would not only enhance his reputation among both men and women, but it would also alter his life by making him in their eyes irrevocably and indisputably a townsman. To him, now

in his forties, this promised an inner regeneration, a resurrection of the power and glamour of his youth.

Everything drew him to Dafina. The town awakened him in the mornings with its scents of newly baked bread, burnt sugar, and spiced cakes, and in the evenings lulled him by the sweet freshness of ripe fruit and by the melancholy singing of maidens from the gardens. It was cheerless and disquieting to go to sleep without Dafina, and there was promise of passion and joy in waking among the scents that were about her.

Dafina agreed to meet him a number of times, but always, and not by accident, there was someone else with her. She let fall innumerable hints, but no promises. She hinted that he might come this evening, after supper, the first intimation that she might be alone. This was still not much, but it might be everything.

Ever since Dafina's message that morning, he was overcome with a tense and quivering passion, familiar from earlier times but never before so unremitting. Yet he had to do his work and he had to meet Boško. Most of all, he had to consult with Djukić as to what he was to say to Boško, and how. He had to do this, though it was disagreeable to him because it confirmed his dependence, if not so much on Djukić, then on the forces he represented.

Perhaps because of these pressures of time and work, his longing for a meeting with Dafina was reinforced. In his own mind it was but a daydream, lovely yet unreal, even if she were to consent to have him as her lover. For he knew that, even if it became reality, this love affair would have to be different, less rapturous, in conflict with innumerable obstacles and differences between them. And who could tell what she was like in serious love-making, since all she had displayed hitherto had been no more than a game, a playing at love?

But this dreaming, at odds with the events of daily life,

urged him with a strange pacifying force toward a reconciliation with Boško. He almost said to himself: "I must begin a new life; one can always begin life again from the beginning. That's why life is called life."

11

The officials could barely wait for the town clock to strike twelve before leaving their work. Blagota, left alone in his headquarters with the duty officers and awaiting Tomo Djukić, went to the window and looked out at the wooden bridge and the greenish river beneath it. People here and there passed across the bridge, and the river reflected sunshine and the shadows of clouds. The river brought pleasant memories and bore away the discomforts of the day.

He did not even hear Djukić enter the room; failure to knock was one of the ways in which he emphasized his importance and decisiveness. It was not until Djukić addressed him with "Well, are we ready to have a talk?" that Blagota tore himself from the window and advanced to meet him.

But Djukić, whose nickname was the Yellow Man—Blagota called him this only to himself, since Djukić had never accepted this name, given him by God knows who because of his yellow complexion, and which had something offensive about it—without shaking hands and without being invited, threw his Panama hat on the table and spread himself on the divan, with its rug cover, an obvious and isolated relic of Turkish rule. Blagota hesitated for a moment as to where to sit, behind his table or in the wooden armchair opposite Tomo; he finally decided on the latter. But even before he had sat down, Djukić met him with a question and with an equally tough yellow

look: "Who gains by your coming to terms, we or they?"

Blagota was afraid of this very question, since he did not feel able to answer it clearly and unequivocally. One thing was, or might be, plain: that he and Boško, as individuals, would gain. So far as the two political parties were concerned, with all they represented and meant, the question might be answered in a variety of ways. For Blagota, in his dispute with Boško, it was not a question of winning—this now occurred to him for the first time—but of removing something painful that was spreading like an ulcer in his life and branching out into it. Nevertheless, he started to reply that they would gain. Djukić was not of the same opinion, although his statement was nowhere near as clear and positive as had been his question at the beginning of their conversation. Tomo expressed his doubts about the possible gain to their party by stressing that Boško, "that conceited blockhead," as he called him, might even strengthen his position in his district if he did not emerge from the whole tussle with a diminished reputation. Of course, if Boško were to agree to a pension or some good post for his son, or indeed any material benefit, in exchange for an apology on his part, or, more particularly, some political concession, that would be quite a different matter. But it would be naïve to expect this from a man like Boško, and no other course would be left them—and here Tomo was at his most indefinite but also at his most categorical—but to humiliate and insult him in some way and drive him into unreasonable action.

Blagota, however, was outspokenly and firmly against this. "I couldn't," he concluded, though without setting out his reasons, "I couldn't do anything that would humiliate him. I know what he's like; it would make any settlement with him later quite impossible. I can't do it; it is quite out of my character. I should be humiliating myself. I may hate him, I may even kill him, but only as one man

may hate and kill another, without demeaning himself as a man."

Djukić listened attentively as ever, twisting his little yellow beard, clipped and shaped into an oval beneath his lower lip, with his yellow, tobacco-stained fingers. When Blagota had finished, he started to explain. "But this isn't simply a quarrel between you two, I mean between the two of you as private individuals. One can't of course deny that there is a personal element in it, as there is in every conflict. But it's not the only element, still less the main one. This is a matter of something wider and more important, a clash between the two parties, between opposing interests. For that reason the settling of the dispute must be judged from this point of view. And so I put it to you: Who gains from a reconciliation? Everything depends on how your quarrel is settled, or not settled. Yes, the way in which it's done is important, all-important. I, too, am in favor of your reconciliation, but how, by what means? The answer to my question as to who gains depends on the manner in which it is done. We must not lose, we simply must not. We have already lost enough; now it's got to end. The ministry and the provincial government are pushing Boško toward a settlement because the situation between the two districts is absurd; it's like two medieval baronies. The government is open to attack on this account, especially by the Moslem party, which has an interest in the merging of the two districts, in order to merge their Moslem populations and thereby strengthen itself. We can take advantage of this fact if we show more persistence. Yes. We have to count on the Moslem vote, too. Yes. How many Moslems would vote for us if we were to come to terms with him? He is to them what the wolf is to the sheep! Yes. Besides, who or what is Boško? A half-peasant, a beg who never succeeded in making the grade. Merits are one thing, life is another. The government can-

not keep a half-literate man in such a position indefinitely; still less can they maintain a district which hasn't its own proper county town. There's no longer any political need for such districts. Yes. We can, we must, hold out, but we needn't be irreconcilable. Everything depends on the way it's done."

It was extremely difficult, almost impossible, to discuss anything unambiguously with Djukić the moment there was any question of some concrete political point; Blagota knew this from earlier experience. Consequently, Blagota confined himself to trying to fathom the intention behind "the way it's done." But on this point Djukić remained as indefinite as before. It was impossible to prescribe in advance, he finally said. "We do not know what Boško wants and what he's made up his mind to. We must be for a settlement, that must be clear and obvious to everybody. But we can't determine in advance how that will be carried out. We must go and see—and then decide. Yes, see and decide on the spot."

So they never came to an agreement, and the question as to whether Tomo was coming to the meeting in the evening remained unanswered, although Blagota had explicitly asked him. "I don't know, I'll see. To tell the truth, it doesn't concern me directly."

This was in contradiction not so much with his words—he had not until then particularly stressed his interest in the matter—but with the real situation, and, of course, with what he himself wanted. Blagota knew all this. But before he had made himself clear and definite on any point, Tomo, on the pretext of an important meeting, left so hurriedly that Blagota, who was locking the drawers, could not even detain him so that they could leave together.

Slowly, jingling the keys, Blagota went down the worn and creaking wooden stairs. At the street door the Moslem attendant gave him a military salute, at the same time

bowing low. Despite the fact that the stream of events flowed on and things continued to change, Blagota could not help remembering that less than ten years ago this same attendant, or one like him, in the same way had saluted the Turkish Kaimakam. He paused, as if hesitating which way to go; then turning to the attendant he said undecidedly, almost confidentially: "If anyone of importance asks for me, say, someone from Madame Dafina's, remember everything they say and then tell it to me alone."

The attendant bowed still deeper, but this time with his hand on his chest, which among the Moslems was a sign of devotion, and in this case a sign of familiar, obsequious, unpleasant understanding.

12

As he made his way in the street, Djukić assumed his usual leisurely air of dignity. As if casually, to down a brandy before lunch, he reached, through the side streets, Dušan Bosković's café at the bottom end of the bazaar. The clerk Krsto Marić was already waiting for him there, leaning on the counter in close talk with Dušan. Having taken the dram Dušan pushed over to him, Tomo joined them without causing any commotion or interrupting their quiet conversation, though the clerk considerably moved over and made room for him.

The café owner and the clerk met him with questioning glances. Tomo drained the glass, wiped his whiskers with his handkerchief, and said quietly but authoritatively: "Yes, the head men are inclined to come to terms. We shall have to cook up something and not allow that blockhead to leave town without a tear in his trousers." Then, not waiting to hear what the clerk and the café owner might say, he moved off as deliberately as he had entered, saluting

passers-by with a touch of his hat and with a vague smile muffled in his beard.

Dušan was not in fact a café owner at all, but one of Tomo's chief supporters. A freebooter under the occupation, he had distinguished himself more by his brutality than by bravery, and partly by extortions, partly by trickery, he had secured a house and property in the town, and the café served more as a cover and a meeting-place for a group of roughs—barbers, butchers, and country toughs with those help he broke up opposition meetings and brought pressure to bear on the other side. Raising his huge, gnarled, swarthy head, he turned his scarred and shaven face angrily and almost contemptuously after Tomo and jerked out in a scarcely audible voice: "And he leaves us to break our heads over it alone. If the pudding's a bit too hot, we'll get burned because we cooked it."

The clerk also had a big head, but without the same knotty look; even his skull seemed soft with fat. Whispering quietly under his clipped brown mustaches, he put in: "We must find our own means; we know what's required. The main thing is to see that something is done. It doesn't matter how."

The clerk had already had a lengthy talk with Tomo on the subject, but he did not tell everything to the inn-keeper, on whom he had to rely. Although Tomo had not given him a clear and complete account either, this did not mean that he had not clearly grasped that a reconciliation was to be prevented by the most suitable and most effective means, namely, by irritating Boško's vanity and damping Blagota's desire for a settlement.

That was the origin of Tomo's or the clerk's idea of using hired gypsies against Boško, to shout and beat tin cans, and hurl eggs and tomatoes. It could not be established whose notion this was, since at the inquiry the clerk and the Deputy avoided accusing each other, and the man

through whom the plan had been carried out, Dušan, the innkeeper, was no longer among the living. The judges were partial, since they, too, were divided between different parties, so that the only account of the incident that could be taken as at all reliable was the one that had become firmly rooted in the popular mind—namely, that Tomo had prevailed on the clerk to undertake some action so humiliating to Boško that it would make his reconciliation with Blagota impossible, and this, of course, could only be something that irremediably wounded Boško's pride and vanity. And if their evening conference was to be poisoned with bitterness, it was necessary to bring the plan to Boško's ears so that he would come to the conference already angry and indignant. The execution of the project, however, had to be postponed until the situation developed further, keeping the gypsies in readiness.

Tomo had a habit of saying: "An opponent is most surely struck with his own weapons." With reference to Boško, this meant inflaming his pride. If an honorable name and pride, without which no true prowess could be thought of, had been the foundation stones of Boško's ancestors, in him they had become more a belief that life would be impossible without them than a real necessity of life. Boško, like other chieftains, had been forced by the realities of life to renounce his own pride and the fame of his ancestors and to grab for property and position. But the appearance, the husk, of honor and reputation had to be preserved at all costs, hence that sensitivity in regard to them, and even a readiness to die for them. For people live just as much in the past and in illusions about themselves as they do in the realities of every day.

But if Boško and, in another way, Blagota were not conscious of this, Tomo was. He was a man of the present and of reality more than they were, and more of a piece and less torn between the requirements of life and the in-

herited spirit of his ancestors. Although in favor of the negotiations, Tomo was for a settlement only on terms that he knew that Blagota would not accept. And although he had been educated in Serbia and had worked actively before the wars for the unification of the two Serb states, he now saw no reason—from his point of view, which was always in accordance with his own material and political interests—to heal the rift between the two stubborn Montenegrin chiefs, even though, only recently, they had fought beside him for the new state, not weighing what this would cost them personally and how deeply it would plunge them into hatred and violence.

Idealistic motives had seldom played a noticeable part in his work; no ideal existed for him outside its realization and his own interests. He had, no doubt, been ready to lay down his life for union, but he was so submerged in Serbian official policy—in the machinery by which this policy was put into effect—that he subordinated to its passing interests the glitter and the devotion attending the ideal. Serbian policy, although it had union in view, first and foremost the union of all Serbs, and then that of all Yugoslavs, retreated from this objective as soon as the objective appeared unrealistic, and, in particular, when it became a threat to Serbian policy. This policy toward union was directed in practice not merely to the expansion of Serbia, but predominantly to the expansion of those interests and influences that Serbia represented. It was a policy of opportunism, and not to any great extent of principle, but it was strong in its ruthless, unyielding practicality.

Like youths from other Yugoslav lands, Montenegrin youths in Belgrade, inspired by liberty and the Yugoslav Idea, often hungry and even more often persecuted, plotted assassinations and issued fiery proclamations, and thereby created embarrassment for official Serbian policy. Tomo Djukić was neither against them, nor did he wholly belong

to their circle. People like him carried out their own work persistently and in obscurity, paid by the Belgrade government, but also convinced that this was exactly what was required and what it was their duty to do. They collected information and created underground networks; they bought men and data, leaving ideals to others, and were inclined to justify the government's going back on them, even on such major questions as the recognition of Austria's annexation of Bosnia and Hercegovina.

There were not many such people. They did not lead the movement for union, and they were barely, if at all, known within it. But they did take advantage of it; it supplied them with men of fire and devotion, with whom money did not count for a great deal and without whom no fight for ideals is remotely conceivable. Men of this sort would have been unsympathetic characters even if they had not at times been covetous, gloomy, and taciturn, possessing more self-confidence than real ability, and forever letting it be known that behind them stood someone important and powerful, on whom everything depended. But it was such men who prepared the ground for the policy of the state, without which ardors and ideas would have been reduced to idle dreams and lifeless words.

It was not until after union that these men became prominent and gained power. The idealists now lacked the turn of mind for the conduct of petty, everyday politics, which these men had acquired in their perfidious, painstaking struggle. Not only were the links between the idealists and the sources of power—money and authority—extremely weak, but many of these idealists, in their puritanism, strove to avoid these sources in the naïve belief that even in peacetime ideas would continue to play their wonderful and fascinating part.

Such men—Tomo Djukić was one of them—came to Montenegro with the Serbian Army. The effective power

at once fell into their hands, regardless of the fact that they did not operate directly. Behind them stood Belgrade, with that same practical policy, which had branded even union with its own narrowness and selfishness. Behind them also were the new banks, foreign and native, the credit and financial institutions, the police and the generals, the speculators, the court, the colonial powers, and the state services. And they formed a new class, of both politicians and brokers of contracts and concessions. Since they were exceedingly well informed, they gave an impression of reliability and secret power. But it must be admitted that they were stronger than they looked and habitually enjoyed more confidence than they could repay. Most of them men of no education, they occupied themselves with affairs not in their line; and, at bottom, despising clean politics, they snatched at a deputy's mandate or at high position simply as a steppingstone to further wealth and power.

But for all their unscrupulous practicality, they did not entirely succeed in finding their place in the new conditions. Even if the opportunity to grab power came their way, they did not always succeed in consolidating it, just as they never knew how to rehabilitate mines and estates. They knew only how to create force, not how to govern. They could grab wealth, but not make it fruitful. The more unpopular they were, the more they hated in return; and always uneasy themselves, they inspired unrest.

Tomo Djukić also failed to attain peace and security. Born of a poor family, he had now, at forty, won power and wealth—a house and gardens in the town, an agency that sold timber to a firm in Sarajevo, some land with a mine in Metohija, and solid connections with the political chiefs in Belgrade. But all this was insecure. Political constellations were subject to change at any time, all his properties were heavily mortgaged, and without substantial additional means, he could not get them going and de-

velop them. The wars had deprived him of his best years. He had married after union; even if he had had time before, as a poor man he would have been unable to marry as was proper. His wife had brought him some dowry—a good foundation. But then troubles started. There were difficulties over concessions and scandals in the press. A deputy's mandate opened all doors and covered a multitude of sins, but he did not win one. And why? Some Montenegrin chief, Boško Simović, had taken it into his head to pursue a policy of his own. And this fellow Blagota, unreliable, unstable, a mass of pompous arrogance and fine manners, now wanted to reach a settlement and salve their injured honors, his own and his opponent's. He failed to understand the need for an arrangement with the Moslems, or even with the Albanian leaders, with the people who had been their enemies until yesterday and might be again tomorrow.

Life is a struggle; but must it always and only be a struggle? Djukić believed that the new men, himself among them, would be able to move in a new direction—toward a larger freedom and away from backwardness and from dependence on foreign countries and outside capital. But it did not work. Plundering, violence, fraud—it was impossible to maintain one's position without them. The life of a wolf in virgin forest it was, nothing else.

And if those were the only troubles! Djukić had difficulties in his family, too. Instead of living in high style in Belgrade, his wife had been obliged, for the sake of the property, to come here, to a remote Moslem town, into a society that was unfamiliar, closed, and alien. One could not even get a good servant, only a slow and cross old Moslem woman.

Then, there was no private life. The whole of his private life was sunk in this frantic struggle for power and wealth, in stratagems and surprises. Every effort to keep one's

hands clean and attain any kind of peaceful existence would be in vain. It was as if the war were still on. So life would pass in struggle and disquiet. Everything else had to be subordinated to that. He did not even drink or gamble. As for women, there were casual encounters, mostly with women who sold themselves on the streets of Belgrade and committed no one to anything. Even there he had to be careful; someone might find out and throw mud at him before his constituents.

Whether he liked it or not, everything had to be placed second to personal success, although something more than purely personal success was involved. Roads, mines, factories, all these had to be created. And was this for his sake alone? Individuals start them, spurred on by gain and ambition, but the advantages accrue to all. He was already regarded as a bully and a slave driver, not merely by the Communist agitators—though there were none here and their party had, luckily, been banned—but by ordinary, nonpolitical people.

If only one had time and it did any good, he would weep for himself and his country. The pressures and threats of foreign powers, the disunion of the newly unified state, the predominance of the Croats and Slovenes in economic life, the dangerous, intolerable shortage of capital—the government could not create it, and private individuals did not have any—enormous possibilities side by side with plans that could not be realized and vain speculations. It was as if victory had been the beginning of a new collapse and of a final dissolution.

And these people here were causing still more trouble. The officials sat in the country towns—cheap because they were utterly Godforsaken—squandering the pay they had not earned, swilling brandy, intriguing, shuffling cards, annoying and harassing the people, and waiting for their pensions. The merchants squatted on their counters cheat-

ing the peasants, and the peasants were unceasingly at war with everything that was not their primitive and harsh way of life. And these semiliterate district chiefs treated the townsmen brutally and with familiarity, regarded their position as their proper reward, went to their offices, if they ever went, reluctantly, swaggered about all day long like princes—which in a sense they were—in full national dress, looking out for the girls with one eye and looking to see who might snatch the power from them with the other. Then they quarrel on a point of honor! Honor that has nothing to do with anyone but themselves; it's like the gold in the flint, barren and useless. They're a bygone world, cattlemen from the struggles of the Middle Ages, from Turkish times.

And the two of them might yet come to terms this evening, in the same absurd way in which they had fallen out. They were unable to see the forces piled up behind them and to grasp that here, in this out-of-the-way little town, it was a question, to a degree, of the survival of a whole outlook, a whole movement, a whole social class. What was this to them? They've decided that there's really no sense in two men like themselves bickering over trifles; they genuinely believe that even today they stand for something, with their "honor" and their "chivalry." Montenegrins, Montenegro—an empty stomach and the head in the clouds! Ballad singing under the bombers!

In the past, Djukić had often, though never for himself, used knives, bombs, and pistols, against Bulgarians, Albanians, Germans, and traitors to the Serb cause. Now, in one's own state, with law and order, it was impossible to do this, and it was neither to his party's interest nor to his own. But there it was; it seemed as though the time had come for such methods to be used even against domestic enemies. Who could guarantee that the two of them would not reach an agreement that evening? They were not, it is

true, such deadly enemies, not like Communists or Croat Peasant party men, against whom one could adopt such measures without serious consequences. But couldn't they be made to exterminate each other and leave the field clear for fresh enterprises and combinations?

In any case, Tomo had to be present at the evening's meeting. He could not lay down any definite plan, but he had to be ready for anything, ready to feel his way, to provoke. He was used to taking care of himself, but not to taking fright. The whole town had turned into a single eye and a single ear. The Moslems, hidden away, were waiting and wishing for evil to hit the Montenegrins. He dared not allow a settlement not in his own interest. It could mean defeat, the loss of his seat in the future, a disaster from which he could never recover. In this country, even now, one could win nothing without risking one's head.

He had had many enemies, though fewer than he thought, and there were still rebels swarming in the woods. For that reason Djukić never went out in the evenings without urgent necessity. But tonight he would have to; he dared not leave the self-willed chiefs alone.

The thickening of the dusk, which poured into the streets from the forests and hills, bearing away the hubbub of the market and the smell of cattle and peasant blankets and bringing in the freshness of mountains and springs; the murmur of the river; and the singing of girls from the Upper Town; the lighting of lamps, lanterns, and stars in a market town suddenly gone dead and out of the world—none of this brought Djukić the customary crystallization and clarification of thought and a resolute plan of action. But plans, obscure and dimly guessed at, assumed a certain solidity, and even a quality of anger. As always before a final reckoning or carrying out a decision, he felt a chilling, but at the same time agreeable, inner tremor, but this

time more noticeable—his jaws and lips were clenched, his stomach was throbbing. He must pull himself together, calm down, he told himself, and at once noticed an easing of the tension, although his thoughts became no clearer, and his plans took on still more of that hard anger.

He stuck a Belgian revolver into his belt and pulled it around behind him; he thrust in another beside it—a Steyer—of which not even his wife knew; it had been confiscated from a captured and liquidated Austrian officer and was kept in an iron box under some important papers. (This revolver was later found at the place of the encounter, and since the owners of all the other revolvers were identified, it followed logically that this one could only have belonged to Djukić, although there was nothing to prove this, so there was no valid ground for charging him with it.) But before buckling on his revolvers, Djukić glanced at their barrels; he took the bullet out of the chamber of the Belgian revolver and placed it in its magazine; he took the bullet out of the magazine of the Steyer and thrust it into the chamber. His wife came upon him in the room just at this moment, but since she knew nothing about weapons, she did not realize that her husband was holding in his hand a second, unfamiliar, revolver, nor what he was doing with it. She was simply uneasy at her husband's going out at night, armed, although he always carried a weapon on him.

His farewell to his wife, which was tenderer than usual, prompted Djukić to think more soberly of the dangers. It was not until he had opened the gate and looked out into the darkness of the street that the dangers became almost palpable to him—they lurked behind fences and corners, they watched from gateways and from the thick, limitless dark.

As always, the town was unlit; at three or four cross-roads there were lanterns, so feeble that the light of one

could not assist that of another. Darkness, poverty. But the darkness was not altogether a bad thing; it was safer, both for the one stalking and for the one being stalked. There was a dull silence in the town, although on a pleasant autumn evening like this the bazaar should still be lively. Even the far-off singing of a girl had vanished, as if cut off. The townsfolk were clearly scared, expecting trouble. In his heart of hearts Tomo did not like the Moslems; they hated Serbs, and their religion bound them together when political parties and programs were being drawn up. It would not have been a bad thing if the Montenegrins had settled with them once and for all. Everything would have been plain sailing, and the Serbs would be alone with themselves. At this evening's meeting there would be only Serbs, Montenegrins, in a predominantly Moslem town, which was watching them with malicious glee. He felt for his revolvers, and thought: Well, in this at least I'm still a Montenegrin. I love weapons and I don't hesitate to draw them if need arises. Nor do I hesitate to risk my life when something vital is at stake, and that's Montenegrin, too. And what is there at stake that is vital now? Who can tell? Who can tell what may be vital when? People hate and fight, to the death. And they must always be ready for a showdown. That's our life, Montenegro, the Balkans, slavery and revolt, humiliation and heroism. So it must be. There had been hopes that with union it would no longer be like that, but that had proved to be an illusion. The wolves merely howl in a different way.

Tomo did not hurry. His plans, dimmer, darker than this night so poor in stars and still poorer in lighting, held him back. He enjoyed stealing through the streets, and was appalled at his own thoughts about his country and his times, and even about himself.

As he climbed with slow but firm steps to Dosta's café, he was confident that he was the last to arrive and that he

would break in as if by chance at the right moment and give the dispute the turn that suited him—neither obvious exasperation nor yet reconciliation.

13

The last to arrive was Boško Simović.

As he himself admitted later at the inquiry, on his way to Dosta's café with Radoje and Topović he left them and went with Naso to take care of the horses personally. It seemed to him extremely important that the horses should be ready at the agreed spot, with their bridles on and their girths ready tightened. He later explained his careful preparations as owing to fear of a gypsy attack—with his horses all ready, he would be able to break away and escape whenever he wanted to. He could not imagine anything worse than to be humiliated by gypsies. Montenegrins looked on gypsies as a low and worthless lot, given to begging and vagrancy, trickery and the repairing of kettles. Montenegrins were particularly contemptuous of the town gypsies, who lacked the Romany boldness, and were crammed into their special quarter, into hovels plastered with mud. What added to this contempt was the fact that the Turkish authorities had very often used gypsies as torturers and executioners and had employed them in plundering expeditions and pogroms. And what placed a regular Montenegrin, and especially a chief, even if he did not occupy such a high position as Boško did, in an impossible situation in an attack by gypsies was that he could not for shame fight with them in any way. All Montenegrins, and especially chiefs, considered fist fights a disgrace even among themselves, and much preferred to use their weapons, but if one were to draw a pistol on a gypsy—what blacker disgrace and scandal could there be than to have to

answer for a gypsy before a court! The only thing that Boško could do, as he explained, was to break through the gypsies on horseback and escape. That was why the horses had to be ready and near the café.

Radoje and Topović wanted to accompany him, but he refused, asking them to take seats in Dosta's café so that they would not have to stand later. He added that he still had some purchases to make.

He did in fact buy some things. He was suddenly moved to buy a silk scarf for his wife. It occurred to him that he ought to buy something for Šemsa, but for some reason or other this seemed to him unsuitable at that moment, so he did not. Later, before the court, while, of course, keeping silent about his relations with Šemsa, he clarified the meaning of that moment: "After all I had heard that day, I must have anticipated and expected an attack on my honor and my person."

He could not fail to notice the look of solicitous attention the Moslem shopkeeper had given him or the care with which he had wrapped up the black veil for him. But he was a regular customer there, so he attached no particular significance to it, nor to the way in which the shopkeeper wished him good-by three times over; the man might have done it out of particular politeness, so characteristic of his profession, and not because he, a Moslem, was anxious that nothing untoward should happen to the Montenegrin District Chief on his night journey. Boško could not believe that in that place at that moment he would arouse in the shopkeeper a sympathy neither commercial nor Moslem. As he himself acknowledged, he was gripped by the possibility of a clash and of humiliation to such an extent that he could take no interest in anything else.

On the way to join Milić and attend to the horses, Boško did not say a word to Naso. But from Naso's behavior and,

later on, from Milić's, who spoke in whispers and cast a suspicious look at every passer-by and into every corner, he concluded that they, too, had their forebodings and were expecting an attack. Boško felt that Naso was even more loyal than Milić. It was an unconditional loyalty, which manifested itself neither in words nor in gestures—they hardly spoke at all, and, indeed, in the feeble light of the few street lamps they could hardly make each other out—but it showed itself in Naso's firm step and upright carriage. He followed a step or two behind, and at a word or gesture from his chief, he leaned forward and nodded silently as a sign that he had understood what was asked of him. Boško at once began to look on Naso as someone not merely intimate and devoted, but of his own blood—if not a son, at least a nephew. But what struck him as most extraordinary, and even amazing, was that in the horses, too, whose girths Milić had already tightened and whose bridles he now held in his hands, Boško noticed an almost human trustworthiness and agitation, like that of the two men; the horses walked with a firm, measured step, but one could hear them snorting or jingling their harness from time to time. All three knew the town well, but Naso and Milić followed Boško silently and without protest to whatever place he would choose for Milić to wait for him with the horses. Milić did mutter once: "Let us be a bit nearer to you." This was just what Boško had intended: he had chosen a broad alley that linked the wheat market with a street connecting the Upper Town with the bazaar. The spot was less than three hundred yards from Dosta's café, yet it was secluded and unlit.

Milić and the horses remained around the corner in the dark, and Boško and Naso made their way up the steep hill to Dosta's café.

Boško had long been familiar with this café and its approaches. Yet, he drew near it cautiously, examined its

location, and glanced at its entrance. He could not have said that he did so with any specific or clear intention; rather, it was done unconsciously, as a man wriggles before settling to sleep or feels a razor blade casually and yet with care. He observed a number of details as if he were there for the first time. The doorstep, for instance, suddenly seemed higher than his boots. As he crossed it he said to Naso: "Listen, son, if I take out my watch, you fire at the lamp and then run and hold the door open." He wanted to ask him whether he had understood, but Naso, nodding, said of his own accord: "I understand," without the usual "Mister Commissioner."

The top of the stairs was poorly lit and in dead silence—as if there were no one in Dosta's café. Boško went almost joyfully up the stairs.

But the light was that of a failing gas lamp, and the silence was that of men ready for a quarrel and a squaring of accounts.

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Dosta's café was not in fact a café, any more than its proprietress was a true coffeehouse keeper.

A poor war widow, and a clean, civil woman, Dosta had obtained a municipal license to serve coffee and brandy in her modest house; the municipality rid itself of the obligation to help the widow, and the town gained a secluded spot for relaxation and talk. Dosta had no one with her except a servant, Fata, an elderly woman prematurely withered. Her café, especially in the evenings, was the resort of men of standing who wished to talk without interruption, in the certainty that the women of the house, whose presence was hardly felt, would not retail anything they might hear.

The large house in which Dosta's café was situated was entered by a wide gateway from a steep and crooked alley which ran from the Upper Town to the bazaar. On crossing the threshold of the gateway, there opened out before the visitor a spacious square courtyard paved with stone, arranged for the accommodation of horses, with mangers under the arches, a storehouse for goods on the right, and a shed for hay on the left. To the right of the gateway, steep wooden steps led to a corridor on the floor above which went in a circle above the courtyard and from which one entered rooms, also circularly placed. The building had originally been constructed, and still served, as a caravansary, although it was now dilapidated and neglected. To the left of the gate, wooden steps, identical with those on the right, also led up, but to two little rooms only, the one on the left with gable windows facing the bazaar was larger and served as Dosta's café, while the one on the right, facing the courtyard, served as bedroom and kitchen. In the café there were in all four small tables, at which quite a few people could sit at a pinch. Because the café and kitchen, as well as the staircase, were kept scrupulously clean and neat—every little thing was invariably in its place—peasants rarely ventured in, whereas it was precisely this spotlessness and the attentive but not pressing hostess that attracted townsfolk who were anxious to have a quiet talk.

On this evening Dosta and her servant were not surprised by the visit of so many distinguished people—there were fourteen of them. What did surprise them, however, was that all were Montenegrin chiefs, not a townsman among them, as well as the manner in which they had entered the café and seated themselves. They entered either with reserved, painfully forced greetings or else noisily, varying with the person concerned, but addressing only their respective groups, and seated themselves at tables

which had been pushed together so that the two groups faced each other. But because there were more men in Blagota's group than there was room along one side of two tables, seven of them were left standing behind those who were seated with their backs to the wall. Opposite them, Boško's group, which consisted of four in all—Boško, Radoje, Topović, and Naso—were more comfortable; the first three were seated at the joined tables, with Boško in the middle, and Naso was to one side, under the lamp that hung in the center of the wall opposite the two windows, so that the light fell evenly on both groups.

Fata had just served Blagota and Djukić coffee—they were sitting next to each other between the clerk Krsto to their left and the innkeeper Dušan on their right—when Boško appeared, accompanied by Naso. Fata did not know Boško but judged by the richness of his dress that he was a prominent chief. He wished no one good evening, but there was a stir among those present. They moved their heads and exchanged glances and provocative, sinister smiles. Topović was the only one to rise from his seat, to let Boško in to the unoccupied chair between himself and Radoje. More astonished than alarmed, the old woman hurried into the kitchen. "Allah be with us, Mistress, what a nasty silence there is among those men, and it's as if there were a gaping hole between them."

Already well on in years, and small and pale, Dosta felt less curiosity than uneasiness, and hastened to carry in a fresh bottle of brandy to those who were grouped around Blagota. Although she was accustomed to hearing what was not to be repeated, Dosta, who came of a poor but distinguished old Serbian family, could not conceive of rough words in her house, let alone brawling. The people who frequented it might harbor evil thoughts, but they knew enough to keep clear of trouble in broad daylight. However, by the time she entered the café the silence had been

broken, and when she returned, having forgotten in her excitement to shut the door, she said to Fata in a whisper: "Silence indeed! There were sparks flashing from their eyes; their guns seemed ready to speak."

Everything developed much quicker than anyone could have expected. The months of accumulated, unspoken hatred contributed to this, as well as the fact that on Boško's side only one person spoke, namely, Boško himself, while on the other side, which was composed of men at odds among themselves, there was competition, especially in the presence of their leaders, Blagota and Djukić, as to who should be the first and fieriest to insult and challenge Boško. Everyone spoke except Djukić, who remained silent, slowly stirring his coffee and stroking his beard. Blagota was the only one who tried to put in a pacifying word: at first he fidgeted and looked at his watch as if wishing to cut the whole thing short, but later on he seemed to have abandoned the idea, unwilling to be separated from his own party and to damp down the quarrel.

As the exchange of insults and threats reached its height, making impossible the withdrawal of the other, more numerous party without disgrace, the women heard the newcomer say: "I won't go brawling with gypsies; I'll go for the real culprit. I won't give up my good name, even if you've changed yours for a gypsy's!" At that Blagota flared up. "Don't libel us. Everyone's good name is as dear to him as yours is to you!" Then Dušan, the innkeeper, shouted—and it seemed to the women as if the flame in the lamp trembled—"Good name indeed! If you cared for your good name, you would not have plundered Turkish land. Gypsies are too good for the like of you!" Suddenly angry, Blagota went on: "You've grown to be quite a pasha in your village, but someone may yet pull the rug from under your feet." This clearly galled the newcomer. He had risen to his feet, and his figure cast a shadow across

the window. His voice quivered with fury as he said: "Let the man whose mother was not a whore try it!"

Dosta thought suddenly that she should call in the authorities to prevent bloodshed, but the highest authorities were here quarreling among themselves, so she said to the servant: "They will butcher each other yet!" Fata answered placidly, and it was a Moslem woman who had no love for Montenegrins speaking: "It's no wonder. They're like that."

It was then that the turning point came. The swarthy, big-headed innkeeper uttered a roar, cursing the stranger who was so insolent in the heart of their town, and advanced toward him. His chair fell over, and his wavering shadow covered the window on the left; for a moment the shadows of the newcomer and the innkeeper were facing one another on the wall, screening both windows.

It was stated later that Boško had reached for his sash—either to get his watch or his revolver—but before he could get whatever it was he wanted, a shot from Naso's gun extinguished the lamp and plunged the café, crammed with men, into complete darkness, since the small lamp in the passage was also extinguished by gunfire and the light from the kitchen, which was indirect and feeble, did not penetrate as far as the café.

There was a short pause, during which Naso shot out—the women recognized his tall form in the long coat—and stumbled down the stairs. The rest of the men, as if they had been waiting for the darkness to release them from the social decorum and oppressiveness of the room, exchanged their venomous and fiery words for bullets and spurts of fire from their revolvers.

Out of the confusion of shots, cries, and the flashing and stench of powder, four muffled explosions could be distinguished as coming from Boško's side. They were fired by Standard-Bearer Radoje from his old-fashioned Gasser,

an enormous weapon, using lead bullets and a smoky powder. He did not, however, succeed in firing the fifth. Before he could do so, he was mortally wounded. Out of the smoke and splintering fire darted Vuksan Topović, but he received a tingling shock in the back, a shock familiar to him from his war wounds, which robbed one of breath, thought, and movement. He leaned against the wall and drew out his revolver. The women saw that he was pale and exhausted, his strength ebbing into the darkness. With a last effort, he waited. The women did not venture to approach him. The innkeeper burst out and blundered like a bull down the steps. Topović shot after him until he had emptied his revolver. The women heard the innkeeper stumble down the stairs, and saw Topović fall on the landing without letting go of the revolver. Immediately afterward, Djukić broke out and stumbled over Topović's body. The women saw the revolver glinting in his hand. Then there was a crash of window glass and bars. Boško, it was later learned, had leaped out into the street. The firing went on in the darkness, though not with the same intensity.

There were shouts from the police and the distant hammering of hoofs on the cobbles. The stranger and his men had escaped death and humiliation. The wounded were strewn, groaning, on all sides. Somebody shouted: "There are dead and wounded here. Arrest the murderers!"

Six bodies were laid out in the bazaar. The street lamp lighted up their chests, but their heads and legs were lost in darkness, which made them appear huge and swollen and extending indefinitely into the night. A policeman lit a lamp, which illuminated their faces. Among the dead were Blagota, Radoje, Dušan, and Topović. The bodies shrank at once and became smaller than the living men. The attendant from the district headquarters drew near Blagota—the same attendant who had greeted him so

deferentially as he left the office—and giving him a military salute and then placing his hand on his breast, moaned quietly: "Mister Commissioner! Mister Commissioner!" Then, since his chief did not answer, the attendant, again bowing low with his hand on his chest, added sorrowfully: "But I had good news for you, Mister Commissioner." The mustached Chief of Police, at once bewildered and full of importance because he had now become the highest authority in the town, was approached out of the dark by Djukić, who handed him a revolver. "This is my revolver. Please verify that it has not been fired." But the Chief of Police refused to take the weapon, shouting angrily: "Leave me in peace. I have to arrest the criminals. Criminals! Criminals!"

A woman, the Moslem Fata or some other, shouted into the darkness: "This is the end of Montenegro; the Montenegrin chiefs have butchered each other!"

Such was the cry of an unknown, strange woman in the autumn night, a cry in a hoarse voice, neither unhappy nor glad—a dark cry, a judgment on Montenegro.

You, Montenegro, land and state, and you, chiefs, had to fall. Perhaps, Montenegro, this was the only way for something of you to survive—that which made you what you were, which your children will inherit, and which will be grafted onto other countries and other peoples.

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Milovan Djilas

was born in
Montenegro in 1911.

He has at different times been a revolutionary, a soldier, a political leader - and always a writer. At the age of eighteen he went to Belgrade University and won early recognition for his poetry and short stories. He joined the Communist Party, and at the age of 21 was sent to prison by the Royalist Government. With the German attack on Yugoslavia in 1941, he became a Partisan leader and a close collaborator of Tito. Up to the time of his expulsion from the Communist Central Committee in January, 1954, he was one of the four chiefs of the Yugoslav Government, at various times being a Minister, head of the Parliament and Vice-President. His open criticism of Communist bureaucracy caused a breach with the Party leadership. In 1956, when he refused to recant, he was sentenced to three years in prison. With the publication of *The New Class* abroad he was retried and his sentence extended another seven years. He was conditionally released from prison in January, 1961, and wrote *Conversations with Stalin* between then and his rearrest and return to prison in May, 1962.